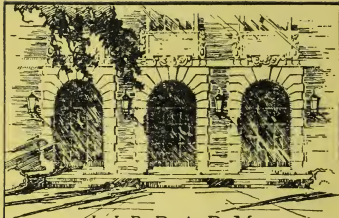


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Stirring Times  
&C.

J. S. FLETCHER  
AUTHOR OF  
WHEN CHARLES I. WAS KING

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# FOR THOSE WERE STIRRING TIMES !

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

J. S. FLETCHER

*Author of "When Charles the First was King," etc., etc.*

LONDON

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## NOTE.

The Yorkshire dialect which appears in several of these stories is that of the Wapentake of Osgoldcross, the Upper and Lower Divisions of which lie between the Rivers Aire and Don.

J. S. F.

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FOR THOSE WERE STIRRING  
TIMES





## FOR THOSE WERE STIRRING TIMES

WHEN I set out for York that day I had no more idea of engaging in as rare an adventure as ever you heard tell of than I had of running away with the Grand Mogul's daughter. It was the finest May morning—the hedgerows in my meadows were white with hawthorn blossom, and the thrushes were singing in my garden as if their hearts would burst, and there were bees humming and buzzing under the pink and white of the apple trees, and the air was sweet and warm, and the whole look and smell of things made you feel that there was naught to do but be merry and sing "Te Deum Laudamus" all day long. As for me, Ambrose Deane, I had ne'er a care in my heart. I was a year wed then to as sweet a lass as you could find in the Three Ridings, and we had a fine lad-

child in the old cradle on the hearth, and the farm was doing well, and there was money put by and the prospect of adding more to it, and I was five-and-twenty, and lusty of health. It was with a light heart indeed that I kissed my wife at the farmstead door and rode away on my mare, with no more serious business than the carrying of a sample of barley or two to the maltsters at York. It was a sort of holiday for me. I wore my plum-coloured coat and laced hat (the same I was wed in), and carried a spending penny in my pocket ; and I meant, when I had done my business, to have a cup and a crack with some friend or other before I bought a ribbon for the wife and a stick of sweetstuff for the child, and set out homewards in the eventide. Naught more serious than this, I say, was in my thoughts ; but as I have more than once heard our vicar remark, there is no telling what a day may bring forth. And in good truth, this particular day, the twenty-first of May, in the year of grace 1639, was to bring forth many things of a surprising nature.

As luck would have it, I had no sooner ridden out of my orchard gate into the high road which leads from Boroughbridge to York—my farmstead standing a little way to the southward of Aldborough town—when I encountered old Miriam Hales, the Wise Woman of Whixley, who was plodding along the grass at the roadside with the help of two stout sticks. She was as ugly an old sinner as you would find in a day's march, and had a baleful eye which I never could abide a glance from, and I was by no means minded to draw rein and have speech with her ; but she, catching sight of me, halted on her two sticks, and glared at me from under her great bonnet, and I was forced to pull up and speak, lest she should put a curse on the crops or work some charm that would turn the milk sour. I was fumbling in my pouch for a groat to fling to her—for the old hag, wise woman or witch, was but badly off—when she suddenly lifted one of her sticks and pointed it at my very nose with a suddenness that well nigh sent me over the mare's shoulder.

“ Turn back, turn back, Ambrose Deane!”

cried she. "There is trouble in front and safety behind. Bide at home. Help the maids to wind the churn, or sit in the ingle-nook with the lad-bairn on thy knee, but ride not to-day."

"God ha' mercy, dame!" said I. "What is all this sudden frightening of me and thyself? Here is a groat to buy thee a cordial with. Go, sit by that same ingle-nook thyself for a while. Art heartily welcome."

She took the groat between her skinny claws and mumbled over it as if it had been some morsel that she longed to mouth. She looked up at me from her bleared eyes, and shook the stick again.

"Trouble, trouble, trouble!" she piped. "Down the road to York sits trouble, awaiting Ambrose Deane. Turn back, master."

"Good dame," said I, "I have an appointment in York and must keep it. Work me a spell or two to keep me safe, and I will give thee another groat if I come back with a whole skin."

"Trouble, trouble!" she went on piping.

“ Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble down the road for Ambrose Deane ! ”

“ The more need of a spell, then, mistress,” I said, and touched up the mare and went onward. I had no mind to be put off my journey by the vapourings of an old woman, however wise she might be. So I rode on, and at the bend of the road turned and looked at her. She was still shaking her stick and nodding her head under its great bonnet, and she made a figure of ill-omen in the fresh May morning. But I whistled to my mare, and chanted a stave or two to keep my spirits up ; nevertheless, I wished that old Miriam had not crossed my path with her croaking prophecy of trouble. Presently, however, I put her out of my mind. The day was too bright and the birds sang too cheerily to allow of aught but good humour, and the fresh air in my face blew away all thoughts of gloom or calamity.

There was never an adventure along the road until I came to where the by-lane runs into it from Allerton Mauleverer, and there I came up with a gentleman who was jogging along at his ease on a very pretty piece



of horseflesh that I could not help but admire. He caught my gaze and smiled.

“ You admire good horseflesh when you see it, farmer,” said he, pleasantly enough, and with a sort of encouragement in his voice, as if he was not unminded to talk a little as we journeyed. “ What think you of my nag ? ”

“ There will be no better in York market this day, sir,” I answered. “ He is fit for a prince.”

He laughed and patted his horse's neck, as if he were glad to hear him praised. I looked from the horse to the man. He was apparently of middle age ; there was an air about him of distinction or greatness which I could not fail to recognise, but he was as soberly habited as myself, in a sad-coloured riding suit and a plain hat. He carried a sword at his side, but no pistols at his holsters, and I set him down for some gentleman of the neighbourhood that had come forth to take the air. But I knew most of the gentry thereabouts, and I did not recognise this man as one of them, and yet there was something in his face that

seemed familiar to me. He had a high forehead ; his eyes were rather large and expressive, but somewhat sad and thoughtful ; he wore a beard and moustachios, the former trimmed to a point—all these features, I say, seemed familiar to me ; it was as if I had seen the man's picture somewhere—yet that, I knew, was not so.

He looked me over as I looked him over, and I could see that he was just as much interested in me as I was in him, which fact I put down to my great height and the breadth of my shoulders, for I was famous in my own neighbourhood for qualities of thew and sinew. And suddenly he laughed merrily.

“ They do not make many like thee ! ” he said, pleasantly. “ Thou art six foot three if thou art an inch ! ”

“ And one inch more, sir,” said I.

“ A right man to journey along a lonely road with,” he said, laughing. “ Do you never carry aught but that great cudgel which you swing so lightly in your hand ? ”

“ No, sir,” I made answer. “ I have carried this 'twixt York and my farm this

five year. It would go ill with any man whose skull got on kissing terms with it ! ”

“ I’ll warrant you,” said he. “ Well, let’s hope we meet no adventure. To tell truth, I came out from York for a ride in the morning air, and began to enjoy myself so much amongst the hedgerows and the coppices that I lost my way in by-lanes and bridle-paths, and have only just found it again.”

“ The highway is safe enough at six o’clock o’ the morning, sir,” said I. “ ’Tis but a short journey to York—a mile or two will show you the top o’ the Minster.”

At that moment there came the sound of galloping behind us, and I turned to see a man riding along the grassy stretch at the other side of the road at a pace which betokened his desire to get to some point as quickly as possible. He favoured us with a glance as he sped by, and shouted a salutation ; the next moment he had turned the corner and was out of sight. Happening to glance at my companion, I saw that he was gazing after the rider with an anxious look.

"I saw that man as I rode out of York," said he, "and again an hour ago near a village to the left of us. Have you any bands of highwaymen hereabouts? I see we are approaching a deep wood in which they might be concealed."

"Nay," said I. "I never heard of bands, though 'tis true that travellers have sometimes been stopped and relieved of their goods. This wood, through which we must pass," I went on, "has witnessed one or two bouts of that sort in bygone days."

He made no answer to this, but rode on in silence, looking from right to left as we entered the wood, which to tell truth, is somewhat fearsome of aspect, being very thick in trees and undergrowth; and, by all appearance, a likely place wherein to meet robbers, cut-throats, and that sort of gentry. As for me, I had no more fear of it than of my own six-acre next to the house at home; but I could see that my companion did not like its looks, and he peered and peeped about him in a way that showed his dislike of such places.

"A likely place for an ambush!" he

said, speaking, I think, to himself more than to me. However, there was no sign of any living thing beyond the birds, which were filling the wood with music, and we jogged forward very pleasantly, the shade of the trees being grateful and refreshing after the hot morning sun, until we came to the centre of the wood, where a broad turf path crosses the high road ; and here we lit upon the trouble which Miriam Hales had foretold for me.

The thing was all done in a minute. I heard a sudden exclamation from my companion, and a cracking and snapping of twigs and branches ; the next moment I was aware of a number of horsemen bursting out of the wood upon us from each side. Ere we could clap spurs to our horses or take thought for our escape, we were surrounded by a ring of men, compassing us about with a living wall ; and I knew, as I gazed at them, that this was no ordinary affair, for every man of the twenty-odd who confronted us wore a mask.

“ A trap ! ” said the man at my side. He inclined towards me swiftly. “ If you can



get away now or later," he said, "ride for your life to the Lord President at York, and tell him his guest is taken."

He rattled this sharply out of his mouth as he bent to me ; the next instant he sat up very straight in his saddle, and looked sternly round the ring of masked faces.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, questioningly, "what do you wish? It is plain that our progress is barred. The natural conclusion is that you have business with us."

Now, the men being closely masked, I could not detect anything of them or their business from their faces ; but it is certain that the one who singled himself out from the rest to act as spokesman spoke with a certain reverence and politeness in his tones which is not usually heard when a robber—or a cut-throat—addresses one.

"Sir," he said—it was the somewhat quavering voice of an elderly man, and the speaker lifted his hat and showed a grey head as he bowed nearly to his saddle-bow—"Sir, be it our excuse that desperate ills need desperate remedies. Since they who

have the best interests of the kingdom at heart may not have ear of you, it must be forgiven them that they take a somewhat rude way of securing an audience."

"Methinks there is much forgiveness needed," answered my companion, "when one is stopped on one's own road by a company of gentlemen—for I can recognise your quality, in spite of your masks—who dare not show their faces. Well, your audience is secured, though not by my consent. What do you ask?"

"Sir," said the previous speaker, "that you would graciously please to accompany us to the house of one of our number, there to hold council with us."

I stared from him to my companion. I was in a tangle of wonder and amazement, and all of a sudden I realised that the man with whom I had jogged along so pleasantly was none other than his Sacred Majesty King Charles the First! I knew, now, what had made me think his face familiar. I had seen its portraiture on many a broad piece of silver; and now, knowing him for the King, I stared at him, and at one word

from his lips had lifted my oak staff in his defence.

“Am I to understand that as a request or a command?” said the King. “Your words, sir, are smoothly spoken, but methinks your general appearance betokens something very like a threat.”

The spokesman, who had remained bare-headed all this time, shook his head.

“Alack, sir!” he said. “As I said before, when the disease is desperate the remedy must needs be desperate too. We desire speech of your Majesty, and since we cannot get it by fair means——”

“You must needs try foul. Very well; I entrust myself to your mercies, since I can do no other,” answered the King. “I will believe that you have that respect for me which will ensure my safety.” He turned to me and gave me a look full of significance, at which I uncovered, bowing before him. “It seems, Master Farmer,” he said, “that our pleasant companionship is at an end—these gentlemen have business with me; so good morning to you, and a fair ride to York.”

I was about to edge my way through the ring of masked men, but one of them seized my bridle.

“Softly,” said he, in a deep voice. “Thou goest not to any York; we shall have Strafford and his men upon us in a twinkling an’ thou dost.”

“Aye, aye!” cried others. “Keep a hand on his bridle.”

I swung up my oaken cudgel, and another moment and it had fallen on the head of the man who held me, but the King raised his head, and I waited. He glanced round the ring of masks.

“This is a peaceful man going about his business to York,” he said. “Why should he be mixed up in this broil?”

“He knows ’tis the King!” cried one of the men. “He will spread the news abroad in York.”

The old spokesman edged his horse nearer.

“I fear the man must go with us also,” said he. “Nevertheless, on my honour as the liege subject which God knows me to be, no harm shall come to him, and he shall

but be detained until our business with your Majesty is sped."

"Nay, then," said the King, "there is no more to be said. Let us set out for this house you talk of."

And he motioned me to drop my staff.

"I thank you, master," said he. "Let us be peaceable."

So now here was the rare spectacle of the King of England and of Farmer Deane riding captive together amidst a company of masked men. Faith! old Miriam Hale's prophecy of trouble was coming true somewhat sooner than I had bargained for. But there was presently to be a still rarer spectacle. Once within the wood, into which they hurried us from the high road, the old greybeard, who seemed to be in command of this traitorous company, bade halt, and, in tones which would have wrung tears from a stone, informed the King that for grave reasons we must submit to be blindfolded; and therewith two of the troop produced great kerchiefs and approached us. I saw the King's face flush, and his lips seemed about to frame some angry word; but he

presently smiled in a grim yet patient fashion.

“ You had best tie our hands behind our backs, and our feet beneath our horses’ bellies,” he said. “ Come, farmer, we must forego the sight of the sun, it seems.”

Now I knew that they were blindfolding us so that we might not know whither we were being led, and this impression was deepened when, after tying the kerchief about our eyes, I became aware that our horses’ heads were turned round more than once, and that within a few minutes. I could not have said with certainty whether we were going east or west, north or south. We were in the wood, I knew ; and I knew also that the wood was but part of the great Forest of Galtres, covering leagues and leagues of land northward of York. It was evident that the King was being conducted to some stronghold within the forest, but in which direction I could not guess.

In this fashion we travelled for several hours. We crossed a river, which I took to be the Ouse, and there, and for a little space on either side of it, I felt the sun hot



and fierce upon my back, and I gathered from that that we were being taken eastward into the thickest part of the forest. wherein we were presently swallowed up again. After a time, the King, who had ridden forward in silence, remarked that he was hungry and thirsty. The old leader had evidently come prepared for all necessities, and I presently found bread and meat of fine quality thrust into my hand, and later a goblet of mighty good wine, such as I had never tasted before. Then we set forth once more—for they had called a halt during this refectioin—and after some further riding through deep woods, the presence of which I could detect by the coolness of the atmosphere, we emerged into the sunlight again, and moved forward at a quicker pace. And wherever it was that we were going, there was one thing that a man could not fail to notice—we passed over no roads; the going was soft and springy all the way.

As near as I could reckon from the feeling of the sun on my back, it was drawing towards noon when the feet of the foremost



horses began to rattle on the stones of a paved courtyard. It was very hot in that courtyard ; therefore I judged it to be of limited dimensions, and open chiefly to the south-east, wherefrom the sunlight had poured upon its stones all the morning. But from the sunlight they presently led us into a very cool place, which I took to be a great stone hall. There ensued some debate, the exact words of which I could not catch, since the speakers stood at some distance from me ; but presently I heard the King's voice, raised loudly, addressing me as if he stood at one end of the hall and I at the other.

“ Master Farmer ! ” cried he. “ I have our host's word that you shall be well treated during the stay we make here. I am sorry that a chance meeting with me should have caused this putting off of your business, but I trust you'll see York ere many hours are past.”

It seemed to me that there was some significance in the tone in which he spoke the last few words ; but I had no time to think of it then, for a hand grasped me by

the elbow, and a rough voice said, "Come with me," and I felt myself led away along what the feel of my feet led me to suppose was a long, brick-paved passage, as cold as if it were underground. I shuffled and stumbled along this for some distance, still grasped by the hand of my unseen guide, until he pushed me gently to the left, and I felt boards beneath my feet, and thin, somewhat soft material, which I took to be a carpet. The man's hand left my arm, a second later I heard a door closed and bolted behind me, and with that I pulled the kerchief from my eyes.

I found myself in a small room, panelled with stout oak from top to bottom, wherein there was a table, a chair or two, a carpet of fine appearance for the feet, and two small windows, pierced at such a height in the wall that I could not have come at them had I climbed upon the table or set a chair upon that. For a prison the place was comfortable enough, but I had a notion that the King wanted me to break out of it and ride to York with tidings of his seizure, and I began to seek for ways and means.

And looking about me, I suddenly made a shrewd guess that we—the King and I, if one may so put it—were held by the heels in the old castle of Sheriff Hutton, which stands on the eastern side of the Forest of Galtres ; for there, over the great stone chimney-piece of my prison, were four shields, the like of which I had seen many a time over the pointed arch of the great doorway of Sheriff Hutton, and knew to be those of the great folk who had lived there in times past—to wit, the Bulmers, the Nevilles, the Dukes of Norfolk, and the Duke of Richmond. And when I thought matters over—the ride through the forest, the crossing of the Ouse, the fact that the sun was on our backs when we entered the courtyard—I knew that my surmise was right. We had ridden almost due east from the place of our capture, near Whixley village, and any of you that possess a chart of the land thereabouts can see for himself how our march had been through a wild and lonely country to this half-ruinous old stronghold.

It was something to know where I was ;

the next thing to do was to discover some means of getting out. I had not let my wits go to sleep, I promise you, during our ride across the forest, and I had formed a pretty clear opinion as to what all this evil signified. The King was at that time in residence at York, and was lodged at the old Manor House, where the great and terrible Earl of Strafford, Lord President of the Council of the North, had his quarters, and 'twas plain that these men who now had his Sacred Majesty in keeping were some of the disaffected malcontents of the North country, who were for ever crying out against Strafford, and the Council, and the Star Chamber, and the ship-money, and the Lord knows what else. They had watched their opportunity and laid hands upon the King's person, and the King wanted Strafford to know on't, and I was the only man that could carry the news ; so I must out of my prison, one way or another, and then hot-foot to York.

Presently the bolt shot back, the door opened, and in came a great fellow (though naught like as big as myself) carrying a

pasty on a platter, a manchet of bread on top of the pasty, and a measure of wine. He wore a mask that covered all but mouth and chin ; for the rest of him he was a well favoured, chestnut-haired fellow, with sword and pistols, and well habited. He set his provender on the table, and turned to me.

“ Art not to starve in thy captivity,” he said pleasantly. “ Pull up thy chair and fall to with what appetite thou hast.”

“ There is naught ails my appetite,” said I, and did as I was bid. “ But I could eat and drink better with a table companion. Will you not join me, master ? ” I said, mighty polite.

“ Why,” said he, “ I know no reason why I should not. I have naught to do but keep an eye on thee while our lords and masters cackle like so many hens.”

“ Let them prate while we enjoy ourselves, then,” said I ; and I drew my knife and carved myself a great hunch out of the pasty.

He sat down t’other side of the table, and we ate and drank like boon companions,

taking turn and turn about at the wine. I noticed that he smacked his lips every time he drank, and presently, "It's not every day one tastes tipples like this!" cried he. "Ale and swipes go down my throttle oftener than good Burgundy." And thereat a notion came into my head, and I sipped at the wine while making believe to drink heartily of it. Ere long he had drained the last drop, and held the measure bottom downwards, empty. "Ugh!" said he, "'tis finished!"

"Is there no more where that came from?" said I.

"Ah-hah!" said he. "I warrant thee there is, and I'll have a rare try to get another measure. After all, I had strict orders that thou wert to be royally treated—to want for naught."

"Then," said I, "I command an even bigger measure than the last."

He went off, bolting me in, and came back after a time with the measure brimming, and with a couple of flasks that seemed capable of holding a quart each.



He chanted some Bacchanal stave as he set his quarry on the table.

“Thou art a bigger man than I am by four inch and three stone,” said he, “but I challenge thee to drink. Know me for the bravest toper of good liquor that ever lifted can or pannikin.”

“I could drink thee under the table,” said I, with a great show of contempt. “But what is a measure like yon, and two trifling flasks, to a couple of stout fellows like us?”

“Why,” said he, “this is but a send-off Hark thee, I have the run of the cellar!”

“Then,” I said, “fetch another measure like this, and we’ll start fair, and I’ll show thee a trick worth knowing.”

He was naught loth to do this, and came back in a trice with another brimming measure in size corresponding to that he had already brought. While he was away I had resolved on my plan of action.

“Now then,” said I, when he had closed the door, “we start fair. Sit thee down over against me on t’other side the table, thy measure afore thee. So—now I sit

down too, facing thee, with my measure afore me. I call thee a toast, we drink it. Then thou callest me a toast, we drink that. Then I call thee another toast, and we drink that, and so on. As fast as we call, we drink—dost catch the trick on't ? ”

“ ’Tis a plaguey good jest ! ” said he.  
“ Let us start.”

“ The King ! ” said I.

We drank.

“ The women ! ” said he.

We drank again.

“ Myself ! ” said I.

But as he lifted the measure to his lips, I dashed the contents of mine into his face, upsetting him backwards on the floor, and ere he could recover himself I was through the door and had drawn the great iron bolt outside. I stood for a second or two, listening to his curses and ravings, and I found, to my great joy, that the door was of sufficient thickness and fitted closely enough to dull any outcry which he might make.

I was in a long passage, paved with red tiles, set so unevenly in the floor that there



was little wonder I had stumbled along them in my blindfolded condition. I sped over them now swiftly enough, making for a doorway at the further end, by which I gained access to a stairway that led into one of the four corner towers of the castle. At the top of the stairs I found myself in an apartment that was not only empty, but half full of rubbish from the walls ; and I saw that nothing would be easier than to escape from it, for the embrasure of the window had been so enlarged by decay that there was room and to spare for a man's body to squeeze through.

I got into the embrasure and looked out. There was a drop of some twenty feet to the foot of the tower, and, as ill luck would have it, that drop must be taken into the moat, which was full of water, covered over with thick green slime and weed. However, there was naught for it but this, so I presently forced myself through the broken wall, backwards way, clung for a moment to the ledge of the embrasure, and then let myself drop. Down I went into the moat ; but, to my great joy, it was not so deeply

filled with water as I had feared, and I only sank to my knees. Nevertheless, the slime splashed heavily all over my clothes, and I promise you I looked a pretty sight when I scrambled out on the other side.

The next thing was to get hold of my mare, or, if she were not handy, then of some other likely bit of horseflesh. Now I was fairly well acquainted with Sheriff Hutton, and I began to skirt the garden in order to get round to the courtyard ; and, creeping from bush to bush, I presently came to a point wherefrom I could look through the windows of the great hall. And in that I saw a sight such as few other men have ever seen the like of.

The King, wearing his hat, sat in a chair of state, and round him, in an irregular semicircle, sat the men who had brought us to this place. Every man was still masked ; I could see masked men standing at the doors within. There was an air of mystery and secrecy about everything that was enough to make a simple man wonder. I could not hear a word, albeit that some of the windows were open ; but that they

were engaged in active and serious discussion there was little doubt, for I saw their hands move and their heads wag, and I watched the King turn from one to the other of the masks as they addressed him, and once or twice he shook his head as if he refused some request.

However, I spent little time trifling there. What I wanted was a horse, and, if she could any way be come at, my own mare, for I knew that I could depend on her swiftness, and 'tis not every beast that will carry sixteen stone for you. So I edged my way gradually and carefully to the courtyard, thinking that they might have tethered our beasts there; but when I came there, neither ear nor hoof did I see of my mare, but underneath a great elm tree in one corner, tethered to a ring that had been driven into the bark, stood his Majesty's horse, munching a bundle of hay as unconcernedly as though its master were in safety rather than held in duress by malcontents; and at the foot of the tree sat a fellow that had been told off to guard it, and his hands were spread over his paunch, and he was fast asleep.

“ Well,” said I to myself, “ this is no time for nice distinction, and I must need use the King’s horse in the King’s service,” and I crept gently but swiftly across the courtyard. I had got the beast untethered, and was so-soing to him under my breath when the fellow in the mask woke and gave a great cry and made at me. I fetched him a clout under his left lug that sent him spinning like a top, and knocked the mask off his face, and the next instant I was into the royal saddle and making for the gateway. But the man’s outcry had startled others, and as I clattered through the courtyard, men came tumbling out of hall and stable, and there was shouting for horses and then for guns, and in another moment a bullet or two came whizzing past my shoulder, and I bent lower over the horse’s neck, and touched him up with my spurs, and away we went like the wind.

Now I knew the lie of the land thereabouts as well as I knew my own orchard, and I headed for York by the nearest road, taking a short cut across meadows and closes and by-lanes. Never, I trow, had

the horse under me carried such a load, but he was one of stout heart and seemed to know the urgency of his business. He kept up a steady gallop, and took hedges and ditches in his stride, and in less time than you could think there were miles between us and Sheriff Hutton; but, rounding the corner from Strensall Common into Towthorpe village, I dashed right amidst a great troop of men who were pricking it well nigh as fast as myself in the opposite direction; and as I closed with them I saw that they wore the terrible Earl of Strafford's badge in their caps. And then suddenly rose a great cry from amongst them and every man reined in his beast.

"The King's horse!" shouted one. "He rides the King's horse!"

I had reined in too, and they came crowding about me with questionings and menaces, and some of them looked so threatening that I lifted my staff.

"Steady, my masters!" cried I. "'Tis the King's horse, for sure, and a rare good beast at that, and carries a man with an urgent message to the Earl of Strafford at

York ; so if you be Strafford's men, let me through."

"There is no need," said one. "Here is the Earl himself. What is your message?"

"That," answered I, "I will tell to none but the Earl. Which is he?"

He came riding at the tail end of his retinue, and I craved a word with him and whispered in his ear that which you know of. He listened silently, and nodded his head two or three times, as if he understood things which I did not.

"You have done well," said he. "Ride at my side at the head of my men, and show me the shortest way to this place."

"That, please your lordship," said I, "is over hedges and ditches ; but I will have you there in little time," and I cantered forward with him to the head of his troop, and set them all a brisk pace. And after another word or two the Lord President asked no more questions, but I could see that he was sore perplexed and in a deep study, and he rode with his head on his breast. As for me, I was wondering what would happen when we reached the castle,



and I took a firm grip of my oak staff in anticipation thereof.

But we were to see no Sheriff Hutton that May afternoon, for as we clattered over the little bridge that spans the Foss near Tofts, a sudden exclamation from the Earl made me lift my head ; and there, coming towards us under the trees on the roadside, unattended and apparently at his ease, was his Majesty the King—and he was riding my mare.

The Earl turned in his saddle and halted his troop. “ Bide here,” said he, courteously enough, to me, and he rode forward and met the King. As for me, seeing that his Majesty was safe, I dismounted from his horse, and made what shift I could to groom it ; and then, holding it by the bridle, I waited the King’s pleasure. He, too had dismounted, as also had the Earl, and these two great and mighty men stood a few yards from me, talking earnestly, but what they said I heard not.

At last the King turned towards me and lifted his hand. I led the horse to him. He smiled as he looked at us.

"I hope you found my horse tractable, farmer," said he, "even as I found your mare."

"Sir," said I. "I humbly crave your Majesty's pardon, but it was a case of this or naught ; and, as I said this morning, he is a horse fit for a prince."

"And the better for being ridden by an honest man," said he, still smiling. "Well, here is your mare, safe and sound. As for our little adventure"—here he gave me a significant glance—"it is safely over, and there is no harm done. My friends of the masks have had audience of me and gone home—satisfied. And so we will say no more of it—that is, we will not talk of it at market, or in the alehouse corner."

"Since your Majesty so directs," said I, looking as significant as he did.

"We will not even tell our wives," he said.

"Of a truth, no, your Majesty," said I.

He looked at the Earl and laughed, and I laughed too. The King turned to me again. "Then at present," he said, "there is naught but to say farewell, Master Deane."



and he held out his hand to me ; and since I did not know what to do with it, having no learning in the tricks and manners of courts, I shook it right heartily, staring him in the face as I did so.

“ Farewell, sir,” said I. “ God save your Sacred Majesty.”

He bowed his head and lifted his hat ; then he mounted his horse, and in another minute he was riding away with the Earl, and I stood bareheaded in the road watching them. And then I suddenly remembered that it was now too late to meet the maltsters in York, and that I had most likely lost the chance of selling my barley. Howbeit, it was no use crying over spilt milk, so I jogged homewards across country, mightily tickled with my adventure.

It might have been three days after that that there came to my farmstead one morning a groom, mounted on a galloway, that led the horse on which I had made my escape from the old castle at Sheriff Hutton. He put a piece of paper into my hand when I had told him my name, and I opened it and read these words :—

“ This is the horse that you bought in York Market t’other day. Treat him well for the sake of his late master.”

That was how I became possessed of as fine a piece of horseflesh as ever man bestrode. And from the moment that he was mine I ceased to believe in Miriam Hales, and took good care to waste no more silver in buying charms from her. She had prophesied trouble, and lo ! I had got me a horse that had carried the King !

THE END.



MR. RUTHERFORD'S RETURN.



## MR. RUTHERFORD'S RETURN.

JAMES RUTHERFORD had come back—come home—to Slowford, and the countryside rang with the news. Had there been a great war in progress its most exciting events would have paled into insignificance before the fact that James's foot was once more upon his native heath. There was more excitement and more commotion when it was known that James had arrived than if the village crier had gone round to herald the approach of a circus or a menagerie. No one had ever expected to see James again, unless in hopeless poverty and fluttering rags, but here he was, and it was obvious that poverty and James were not even acquainted. It was a marvellous fact, but still a fact, and Slowford wondered at it and talked of it, and rolled it over on its intellectual palate like a dainty morsel.

Ten years previously James Rutherford, at that time a young man of three and twenty, had departed from Slowford, leaving behind him the best of bad characters. From his extreme youth upwards he had always been in hot water ; he had terrorised the schoolmaster and frightened the parson ; there was not an orchard that he had not robbed nor a game preserve that he had not made inroads upon. He would never work ; he would make love to every girl—and there were many—willing to listen to his soft speech, and he was as ready for a fight as for a drink. Sometimes he was lucky at the race meetings and would bring home gold in his pockets—that was the sure prelude to a carousal at the Red Pig, in which all and sundry were invited to share. He was a wild, bad lot, said everybody, except some of the women, whom he had deluded with his handsome face and wicked eyes, and he would end his days in the workhouse or on the gallows. James, however, appeared to be quite indifferent to public opinion, and when he finally cleared out it was with no regret

on his part and with a good deal of relief on his neighbours'. And nobody ever expected to see him again.

And here he was—home once more—after ten years' absence. He went off, a rather down-at-heel, mocking, dare devil lad ; he returned a very carefully attired, prosperous looking, well fed gentleman, with sober manners and an air of distinction. The truth soon leaked out. James Rutherford had drifted to South Africa, had struck oil in the shape of diamonds, had seized his chance with the tenacity of genius, and was now a millionaire. A millionaire in ten years ! There was no doubt about it—the parson and the doctor had seen his name in the papers. And his arrival at his native place was marked by events which only happen when millionaires are on the scene. Mr. Rutherford—plain James no longer—went round the neighbourhood and paid off numerous debts which he had contracted during his youthful days—paid them with handsome interest. He further discharged some obligations incurred long years before by his father, who, like the pre-reformed



James, had not been very particular about money matters. He gained golden opinions everywhere—the parson almost wept in speaking of him, and the schoolmaster rejoiced that he had had the privilege of teaching him arithmetic. James did things in great style—it was evident that there was nothing mean about him. And the apotheosis of his glory was arrived at when he invited all the principal folk of the village—parson, schoolmaster, farmers, tradesmen—to dine with him in the big room of the Red Pig, while all the rest of the folk, even down to the babies, were regaled to supper in the coach house outside.

There was much talk of Mr. Rutherford and his glories in the village that day, and the honoured guests who arrived at the Red Pig a little time before the banquet was ready shared in it to the full—what other subject could they talk of but that? Everything was done in great style—gentlemen were invited to take appetisers, sherry and bitters, gin and bitters, and what not, until dinner was ready, and all at Mr. Rutherford's expense. And everybody

did, seeing that it cost nothing, and tongues wagged freely.

"It must be costing him a deal of money all this here feasting and merry making," said one guest.

"It'll be nothing to him," remarked another. "No more to him than the price of a pint of ale to you and me."

"They do say," said a third, "that he carries thousands of pounds about him wherever he goes."

"And that's true," said another guest, sinking his voice to a whisper. "The landlord yonder told me yesterday that he had to go up to Mr. Rutherford's bed-room one day when he was out, and there on the dressing table he found a packet of Bank of England notes—just lying about, like. Eleven thousand pound there were! The landlord locked 'em up, and gave 'em to him when he come in, and said he didn't ought to leave money lying about. 'I'm among honest folk,' says James, and didn't seem to care. And the gold as he carries, it 'ud buy a farm."

"Well, it's fair amazing," said another,

“ I wish I had his money, or half of it. But here he comes—sh ! ”

Mr. Rutherford, faultlessly attired in evening dress, and wearing a single magnificent diamond in his shirt front, did the honours of the evening with great ease, cordiality, and evident pleasure. Never had such a repast been served in the history of the village. There were dishes which the simple Slowford people had never heard of, and wines which they would never taste again. There were delicacies hard to procure, and liqueurs and coffee that made most of them wonder if they were dreaming. There were speeches by Mr. Rutherford, who spoke very modestly and feelingly, and by the vicar, who voiced the pride of the village in this, its distinguished son, and by the oldest man present who said that he'd seen a many amazing things in his day, but this was the amazingest of all. Then came a visit to the coach house, where there were more speeches, and some songs and singing of “ For he's a jolly good fellow,” from the assembled company, and then James and

his guests returned to the great room where cigars of the best brands and spirits and similar creature comforts were laid out, and settled themselves for an evening's conviviality.

The conviviality chiefly consisted, however, in listening to James. He took good care to see that every man's glass was constantly replenished, that a fresh cigar was always to his hand, and that everybody was comfortable. And he talked—talked well and easily, not in any braggart fashion, but in modest, assured tones, after the fashion of a man who knows that he has proved himself. He told them of his adventure, of his work, of the coming of success, of the building up of a great business. And, at the request of the parson, he entered into a learned, but simply worded disquisition on the prospects of diamond mining in South Africa, and displayed such marvellous knowledge of it in its scientific and financial aspects, that his audience broke up in amazement at his ability and cleverness.

“A remarkably shrewd and able man,” said the parson, as he shook hands at the

vicarage gate with his churchwarden and two or three of his principal parishioners, who had walked through the village with him. "A very able man—a Napoleon of finance!"

"He seems to know what he's talking about, certainly," said the miller.

"It seems a better paying business than farming," said a farmer.

"Paying!" exclaimed the vicar. "My dear friends, there is no doubt that a new Eldorado is being opened up in South Africa. If I were—er, a man of means, and wished to become wealthy I would stake every penny I could lay hands on in mining investments. The returns are simp-lee enormous, as we may learn from the case of our worthy friend and host this evening."

And the rest of them secretly agreed, and went home contrasting their own hard and toiling lives with that of a man who appeared to be able to coin money at his ease, and the old spirit of covetousness began to work.

Next day Mr. James Rutherford had many callers. Each caller had the same story to tell. He had saved money, and

money had come to him from his forbears (they were a thrifty and a hard working, self-denying people, the Slowford folk), and they would like to know if Mr. Rutherford could not invest it for them in his own concerns or in something similar that would bring in heavy interest. And with each Mr. Rutherford talked carefully and in businesslike fashion, and each went away feeling assured that he had been conversing with a master mind in finance, and that his money would be safe, and he himself a rich man. And he naturally told all his friends what he was going to do, and everybody applauded, because everybody was going to do the same thing.

There were a good many people of means and resources in and about Slowford, and there was scarcely one that did not entrust almost the whole of his savings and property to James Rutherford during the next few days. The vicar had a small private fortune invested in railway stock, paying  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. ; he realised and reinvested in James Rutherford, with notions of getting at least 30 per cent. The vicar's wife also



had a nice little capital invested in gilt edged securities—that, too, flowed into James's coffers. And at the end of ten days Slowford had entrusted some fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash to the man whom it had once regarded as a hopeless ne'er-do-weel.

On the last day Miss Pamela Spriggs came to see Mr. Rutherford. He remembered her as a middle aged spinster who had always had a kind word for him in the days when all other Slowford folk had looked at him askance, and who, earlier on in life had given him tarts and apples. He caused her to be admitted. Miss Spriggs had grown ancient, but she was still shy, and nervous, and old-young in manner. Mr. Rutherford made her drink a glass of port before he inquired her business—he guessed what it was before she spoke.

“I—I wished to speak to you, Mr. Rutherford, about a little business matter,” said Miss Spriggs. “I—I have come into money since poor Jane died—two thousand pounds it is, Mr. Rutherford, and its lying



in the bank just now, and hearing of your good fortune, I thought perhaps——”

Mr. Rutherford rose from his seat, and paced the room, apparently deep in thought. He came up to Miss Spriggs's side, and spoke rather brusquely.

“ I'm sorry I can't do anything for you, just now, ma'am,” he said. “ My hands are full, quite full. But as soon as I hear of a good opening I will write to you about it. Good-day, ma'am.”

He bowed her out, and came back to his desk.

“ It'll be a long time before she gets that letter ! ” he said, laughing sardonically. “ No—no—not old Spriggs ! The others are fair game, but she isn't.”

The next day Mr. James Rutherford left Slowford. He was accompanied to the station by nearly all the population of the place, and was given a hearty send-off. But Slowford has never seen or heard of him again—there have been no dividends—there has been nothing, indeed, but weeping and wailing and deep curses—always excepting thankfulness from Miss Spriggs, who

frequently remarks that it was very fortunate that Mr. Rutherford was too much engaged to deal with her little affair, and who is firmly convinced that he was a good man who must have been murdered and robbed on his arrival in London.

THE END.

GADDING ABOUT



## GADDING ABOUT.

WHEN I called upon my old friend, Mrs. Brewster, the other afternoon, with the object of renewing an acquaintance which had been interrupted by long absence from home on my part, I found her pretty much the same in health, spirits, and appearance.

She sat by her wood fire in the same easy chair, she wore the familiar white cap, and grey shawl, and knitted mittens, which have formed distinctive features of her attire for twenty years ; the Old Book was spread out on the table at her knee, and the tortoise-shell snuff box, which the squire gave her on her eighty-first birthday (and that's seven years ago ! ) was convenient to her hand.

I failed to see that she had changed at all ; as for the cottage, it has never changed

since I first went into it, somewhere about '68 or '70—there is never anything new in it except when some careless neighbour, who comes in to clean up, chances to break one of the red-ruddled flower pots in the window. Everything else is older than Mrs. Brewster herself—the old furniture, the blue delf ware, the pewter and brass all belong to periods anterior to the third George.

Mrs. Brewster, at the sound of the lifted latch, raised her eyes from the Old Book, and looked over her spectacles in the direction of the opening door. When she saw that the intruder was Me, she uttered a sort of clucking noise in her ancient throat, as if she had been an old hen welcoming a stray chick back to its coop, and she leaned forward and hooked an easy chair to the hearth by means of the ashplant stick with a crooked handle, which always rests against her little table. The sound and the action implied welcome.

“ Naäy, for sewre ! ” said Mrs. Brewster. “ It’s ye, is it ? I knew summat wor bahn to happen, ’cos my thumbs wor prickin’

all t' mornin'. Come thi' ways in, bairn, and sit tha down bi t' fire—theer's t' owd chair all ready to peäk thisen in."

"And how are you, Mrs. Brewster?" I inquired, being duly peäked in the old chair. "You look just as lively as ever."

"Why, I'm middlin'—just middlin.' I've nowt to complain on, to be sewre, 'ceptin' t' rheumaticks—eh, I've had t' rheumaticks cruel bad sin' ye wor here, I hev soä! T' doctor thowt it wor goin' to be a bad job, but ye see I hev a good constitution. Of course, I can't feshion to get about same as I could when I wor a young 'un, but I can mak' shift to get to t' door on a nice day, and sit theer i' t' sun a bit—I wor theer yisterda' efternoon. An' wheer ha ye been all t' time sin' ye wor here last? It mun be a twel' month sin' I seed ya."

"Been? Oh, I don't know—all over—London and Wales and Ireland."

"Naäy! Well, t' way 'at folks goäs gaddin' about i' theäse times fair caps me. I cannot understand it. I niver been out o' t' parish misen' 'ceptin' to t' market at Sicaster, and that's nobbut t' next door,



as you might say. I reckon when ye goä to them foreigneerin' places 'at ye hev' to travel on t' railway ? ”

“ Oh, rather ! You have to go a long way by the train.”

“ Well, now, I niver wor on a railway train i' my life. I've seed 'em, a two or three times—our George wo'd hev me to goä wi' him one day fifty year sin' to t' station at Sicaster just to look at one on 'em. Lord ha' massy ! I wo'dnt ha' gone i' one o' them things for owt ye could ha' gi'en me. I'd as lief ha' ridden on t' teä kettle.”

“ Oh, but they're very comfortable, you know,” I suggested meekly.

“ Happen soä ; happen soä ! ” said Mrs. Brewster. “ I've heerd a deäl o' talk about 'em. But, ye see, they worrn't known i' my time, and soä I've niver hed nowt to do wi' 'em. I' my time they travelled on t' coäch, wi' hosses—I seen fotty coäches a day pass t' ‘ King George ’ theer, to say nowt o' po-chays.”

“ Why, then, there must have been a bit of gadding about in your time.”

“ Eh, dear me, but nowt like theer is now. Why, tak’ yersen—they tell me ’at ye’ve travelled varry near all ower t’ world and seen t’ owd Queen at Windsor Castle and t’ Poäp o’ Rooäme an’ all—dod rabbit him! —an’ I doänt know what else, an ye’re nobbut a lad, like. When onnybody used to go out o’ t’ parish i’ my time they made their wills and provided for all sorts o’ mischances—I remember owd Mestur William Clough goin’ to London town when I wor a young maid, and it tuk him three weeks to mak’ his prepyrations and say good-bye to all his friends. But ye young ’uns!—eh dear, ye’re here and theer and every- wheer in a minute.”

“ Why, you see, Mrs. Brewster, it’s so easy to get about now-a-days,” I said.

“ I’m sewre theer’s a deäl o’ things outside this parish ’at I’ve niver dreämed on,” she answered. “ I think sometimes ’at t’ world mun ha’ tummled upside down. Why, nobbut t’ other day theer wor that gran-dowter o’ mine—our Robert’s youngest lass Bella—come in as peärt as if she’d been a laädy and says shoo wor off to London bi’

t' excursion train, theer and back all in a day! Naäy, I think it's fair scandalous 'at young lasses is encouraged to traipse about like that theer. I'd ha' laid a stick about her back and gi'en her a job o' plain sewin' to do if I'd been her mother, i'steead o' lettin' her goä gaddin' about i' London town. I niver wanted to go 'scur-sionin' to London town—I niver wor out o' t' parish "

" Then you don't believe in travel, Mrs. Brewster ? "

" Why, I believe i' travellin' about for them 'at's nowt to do and plenty to do it on. But it mun be poor wark, goin' into foreign countries, wheer they've nowt' at ye've been accustomed to. I could bide a good deäl, but I couldn't stan' t' savages, and livin' i' tents, and goin' about w'i naygurs and that theer, especially when theer'd allus be t' fear on 'em killin' an' atein' ya. Naäy, I doän't know 'at I should care to go ram'lin' about, misen. I been varry comfortable ower this here fireside. Theer wor a time once when I hed it i' mind to go as far as York, but I thowt

better on it. They tell'd me it wor thirty mile away, and 'at you couldn't get your dinner theer for less nor fifteenpence, so I said, ' Naäy, I'll bide at home.' "

" Well, so long as you're happy—"

' Eh, Lord bless ye, bairn, I'm as happy as t' day's long! I've t' owd Book theer to read—they seemed to do a deal o' travellin' about i' them days—owd Paul wor allus gaddin' thro' one place to another, and when he worn't travellin' he wor writin' letters to tell 'em 'at he'd come soon—and theer's t' neighbours to drop in, and t' owd squire calls now and then, and theer's a new curate. I been argyin' wi' him about t' Methodisses, but I'm noän bahn to gi' in to noä curates—a passil o' young lads! Oh, I'm happy enough wi'out ram'lin' all ower t' country. I shall see a deäl more nor ony o' ye young 'uns hes iver seen afore long—theer's noän on yer iver been sich a journey as I'm going on."

" Well, don't set out just yet. There's no hurry."

" Naäy, I'm noän i' a hurry. I'm varry

comfortable, 'ceptin' for t' rheumatics. I'm nobbut waitin' for t' orders. I telled t' new curate t'other day 'at I wor girdin' up mi loins, like, for a start. He wanted me to join t' Church afore I set off. ' Naäy,' I says, ' I been a Methody sixty-an'-nine year, and I'll dee a Methody. An' I'll tell thee what, mi lad,' I says to him, ' when I do set off I shall hev' a first class ticket, and theer'll be a front pew ready, soä theer ! ' "

" And what did the new curate say to that ? " I inquired.

" He axed me to keep a bit o' room for him," said Mrs. Brewster.

THE END

NEW NEIGHBOURS





## NEW NEIGHBOURS

Mrs. Gill looked with darkening eyes upon the butter<sub>3</sub> basket which Mary Ann carried into the farmhouse kitchen.

“ Put it on th’ big table, Mary Ann,” she said, in a voice which seemed to suggest that its owner had lately undergone some chastening process, “ and set it down gently, lest the chiny should get cracked agen the knives and forks—I’m sure I hope that nothing may have happened to it ! ”

“ If you please’m,” said Mary Ann, hoisting the butter basket upon the great deal table with a mighty effort of her red arms, “ if you please’m, Mrs. Sutton she said would you mind lookin’ if any of her chiny cups had got put in along of yours, ’cause she finds theer’s some missin’, and the pattern being so much alike——”

“ That’s where all the likeness is, then,”

interrupted Mrs. Gill. "For my chiny is chiny, not new fangled imitation like some folks's that I could give a name to. Take the cover off of the butter basket, Mary Ann."

Mary Ann stripped off the green baize cover, and Mrs. Gill gazed anxiously at the cups, saucers, plates, knives and forks, which she had lent to the chapel authorities on the occasion of the annual tea party. She shook her head and pursed her lips as she saw the condition of crockery and cutlery.

"I do think 'at when one's best chiny and real electerer is borrowed for a knife and fork tea," she said, "and especially when you don't know what Tom, Dick, and Harry's been a'usin' on 'em, 'at t' least they could do would be to wash a little o' the muck offen 'em. Get a big bowl o' hot watter, Mary Ann, while I count the forks."

Mrs. Gill proceeded to take out the various articles while Mary Ann bustled about in search of cleansing materials.

"Two dozen white handled knives and two dozen electerers there falls to be," said Mrs. Gill musingly. "An' three dozen

each o' chiny cups, sorsers and plates—white chiny wi' gold clover leaves on 'em. Now theer's a fork 'at's none o' mine—all mine were electerers, and soft-'arted I were to lend 'em, but I all'ays were on th' soft side when axed to do th' Chappilers a favour. However, them 'at's well disposed is like to be well abused—it's th' way o' th' world. Now, Mary Ann, mi lass, mek haste with that hot watter—put all the chiny in, and the electerer, and keep th' hafts o' the knives out—we'll hev' all that tea party muck offen em 'or we'll see."

"If you please'm, Mrs. Sutton she said as how they'd given 'em one weshin' up already," said Mary Ann, "but she said she felt sewre at you'd give 'em another, m'm, 'cause you was that pertikler!"

"Mrs. Sutton knows 'at I can't abide dirt," said Mrs. Gill, grimly. "Anybody 'at's iver seen my table knows 'at it's famous for its chiny, an' its linen, an' its electerer."

"Here's Mrs. Sutton coming up th' pastur'," said Mary Ann, as she glanced out of the window. "She's carryin' a plate

i' her hand—it mun be one o' yours, m'm, 'at they forgot to pack i' th' butter basket."

Mrs. Gill instinctively felt at her cap and smoothed the apron which she had girded about her comely figure as a preparatory action to washing the forks. She had only recently come to the village, but Mr. Gill had taken the largest farm of which it could boast, and she felt that dignity must sit large upon her. She looked very dignified indeed when Mrs. Sutton, who was the chapel minister's wife, and very tired because of her exertions at the tea party, appeared in the kitchen doorway, holding out a china plate.

"Good morning, Mrs. Gill," said Mrs. Sutton, with as much cheeriness as she could put into her voice. "I found this plate after your maid had gone, so I thought I would bring it to you myself on my way home. It is yours, isn't it?"

"Thankin' you, ma'am, for the trouble," said Mrs. Gill, possessing herself of the plate and bestowing a sharp glance upon it. "Yes, ma'am, that's mine—white

chiny, wi' gold clover leaves on it. It were my poor mother's afore me."

"Was it, really?" said Mrs. Sutton. "It was very kind of you to lend it to us, Mrs. Gill. You must prize it greatly."

Mrs. Gill sighed, and favoured the fork on which she was engaged with an extra amount of rubbing.

"Why, I will say 'at I'm not used as a rule to lendin' out my best chiny and electerer to tea parties, Mrs. Sutton," she said. "Not bein' one o' them 'at's in no way partiklar about what you may call good manners at table, I were all'ays accustomed to good chiny, and good glass, and th' best linen and good electerer—an', of course, you don't care about hevin' every Tom and Polly i' th' place suppin' out o' yer best cups and sorsers and eatin' wi' yer best knives and torks——"

"No, of course," said Mrs. Sutton. "I wondered, you know, Mrs. Gill, why you sent all that good china and those electroplated forks—ordinary things would have done quite well for a tea party."

Mrs. Gill shook her head and sighed.

“ No, ma’am,” she answered. “ I couldn’t have allowed myself to ha’ been repprysented by ordinary things. I know what folks is, Mrs. Sutton, especially when you’ve come new to a place. If I’d ha’ sent common delf ware, i’sstead o’ real chiny, and steel forks i’sstead o’ my best Sheffield, there’d ha’ been a pretty talk all over th’ village. No ma’am, I know what’s due to myself, very well indeed.”

“ Well, I’m sure you were very kind, Mrs. Gill,” said Mrs. Sutton. “ I hope that your children liked the tea party, and that you all enjoyed the concert afterwards? Mr. Sutton and I were so busy that we couldn’t get to speak before you left.”

“ Oh, it were no matter, ma’am,” said Mrs. Gill, with Christian resignation, “ me an’ Gill isn’t the sort to push ourselves forward. Of course, in the place where we lived afore we came to this farm we were thought a deal of, but we can’t expec’ strangers to vally strangers at their proper worth. Oh, we were very comfortable, ma’am, though, of course, I’ve all’ays been used to havin’ a front seat kep’ for me



on such occasions, and if it had been i' th' village 'at we used to live in, William Henry 'ud ha' been asked to tak' his seat on th' platform along wi' th' minister an' th' other gre't folk, especially considerin' 'at he's th' biggest farmer 'i th' place an' 'at I'd lent my best chiny an' two dozen electerer forks. But, of course, we didn't expec' nowt i' th' way of acknowledgment."

"I wish we had known that Mr. Gill would have cared to take a seat on the platform," said the minister's wife "Mr. Sutton thought, you know, that as Mr. Gill was almost a stranger——"

"Oh, of course, we quite understand, ma'am," interrupted Mrs. Gill, with a heroic mien in which there was some trace of pathetic mournfulness. "But strangers has their feelin's. I must say 'at I think, all things considered, 'at more attention might ha' been paid to our Em'ly Jane, as has niver missed Sunday school sin' we came into th' village. I've naught to say agen that little gel o' Mrs. Holt's bein' asked to step up o' th' platform to recite pooitry, but my dowter's as well eddicated as Mrs.



Holt's, an' a deal better—the way Em'ly Jane speaks 'The Old Arm Chair' 'ud draw tears from a heart of stone."

"Oh, I do wish we had known!" said Mrs. Sutton. "She must recite for us at the next tea meeting."

"Well, I don't know, ma'am," said Mrs. Gill, rubbing her hardest at the electro. "I don't know what her father may have to say. He's not the man to put hisself forward, isn't William Henry, but there's no denyin' 'at he felt the slight 'at was put upon him last night i' not bein' invited to sit on th' platform. But, as he said—there's more places o' worship than the chappil."

Next Sunday morning, as the minister's wife was preparing to set out for service, she chanced to look out of her window into the village street. Something she saw there caused her to tap her husband on the shoulder to draw his attention to a small procession which was just then passing through the gates of the parish church. It consisted of two small boys, two larger girls, Mr. Gill, and Mrs. Gill. Each carried a brand new Prayer Book.

“ There ! ” said the minister’s wife.  
“ That’s the result of not asking Mr. Gill  
to sit on the platform at the knife and fork  
tea party ! ”

THE END



# THE PEDIGREE



## THE PEDIGREE

MR. TONKINSON, whose hands were clasped upon the knob of his ash plant, and whose double chin reposed upon his hands, stared at his man of law across the desk which separated them.

“ Summat,” he said, “ summat mun be done.”

Mr. Carter scratched his head with the end of his penholder.

“ I suppose something ought to be done,” he remarked.

“ I said ‘ summat mun be done,’ ” reiterated Mr. Tonkinson. “ ‘ Mun,’ not ‘ owt ’ —we’ve gotten to dew it. Soa theer’s t’ long an’ t’ short on it.”

“ The question is,” said the solicitor, “ the question is—what’s to be done ? ”

“ Naay ! I want ye to say that,” said Mr. Tonkinson. “ Ye chaps ’at knaws all

about t' law's paid to fin' out ways an' means."

"But, my dear sir, this is scarcely a legal matter," urged Mr. Carter. "The mere fact that your son has fallen in lovewith and promised to marry a young woman whom you don't quite approve of does not——"

"They gi'en me an' t' owd woman more trouble nor iver we hed i' all our lives wi' their lovmakkin'!" exclaimed Mr. Tonkinson. "Nowt but soft headedness, I call it—a couple of gawmless young fooils. An' t' lass nowt but a publican' dowter. I'm ashaämed o' my son. I'm sewre ye niver know what ye're bringin' bairns up to now-a-days—he's hed that theer done for him, hes our John Henry, 'at war niver done for me!"

"I know you've done a great deal," said the solicitor, consolingly.

"A gurt deal! I should think we hev done a gurt deal," asseverated Mr. Tonkinson, in a tone which seemed to suggest that he would like Mr. Carter to deny the fact. "He's hed ivery advantage, hes that theer. T' parson, an' his wife, an' my missus, an'



iverybody, wor allus on to me about eddicatin' him—it wor nowt but eddicate an' eddicate till I wor fair stalled o' hearin' on't. But I did eddicate him reight—it cost me five hunderd pound to eddicate that theer lad. He went to one o' t' best boardin' skooils i' t' county, did John Henry—consarn him ! ”

“ Education,” said Mr. Carter, “ is never thrown away—it's a fine investment.”

“ Umph ! ” growled Mr. Tonkinson. “ Happen soa. An' t' boardin' skooil worn't all, neyther. T' parson wod persuade me into sendin' him to t' aggerycultural collidge for a couple o' year—theer wor another three hunderd went ower that theer. An' then mi lord comes hoäm an' starts gallivantin' wi' t' publican' dowter, an' nowt 'll suit him but he mun wed her ! ”

“ There's no denying the fact that the girl's a bit of a beauty,” remarked Mr. Carter, weakly. “ She's just the sort to attract a fine young man.”

Mr. Tonkinson frowned and snarled.

“ Bewty ! ” he said, with fine contempt. “ Bewty ! I mak' nowt o' bewty. I'd

rayther hev' brains nor bewty, and brass afore eyther on 'em. Brains is noa good if ye can't turn 'em into brass, but bewty's nowt at noa time."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Mr. Carter, wearily.

"Naäy, that's for ye to think on," retorted Mr. Tonkinson. "I'm noän to a two-or-three six-an'-eightpences, nor guineas neyther."

"How would it be to buy the young woman out?" suggested Mr. Carter.

Mr. Tonkinson shook his head, and his eyes assumed a gloomy expression.

"I met her on t' road t' other day," he said, in the tones of one who recalls an unpleasant experience, "an' I hed a bit o' conversation wi' her. Shoo's gotten a bit o' summat i' her heeäd, has that theer! I tell'd her 'at I'd gi' her fifty pound if shoo'd gi' our John Henry up."

"Well?" said Mr. Carter.

"Shoo laughed i' my face," continued Mr. Tonkinson. "I wor soft enoo to spring t' offer to a hunderd."

"Well, what did she say?"

“Naay ; shoo said ’at shoo wo’dn’t loiset’ chance o’ hevin’ me for a father-i’-law for a thousand. Shoo’s a tongue like—like a lawyer ! ”

Mr. Carter laughed.

“ John Henry,” he said, musingly, “ always strikes me as being a very clever young man.”

“ He owt to be,” said John Henry’s father. “ He’s hed more chances nor what I iver hed.”

“ He’s plenty of common sense and good judgment,” said Mr. Carter.

Mr. Tonkinson increased in height and size.

“ T’ Tonkinson’s,” he said, “ wor allus cellybrated for common sense. I’ve heerd my owd mother say’ at it wor a sayin’ i’ this part o’ t’ country ’at if onnybody wanted a bit o’ common sense advice they mu’d goa to a Tonki’son for it.”

“ Just so,” said Mr. Carter. “ I’ve heard the same myself. Of course, John Henry’s inherited it. His mother comes from a clever family, too.”

“ His mother,” said Mr. Tonkinson, “ wor

a Cockill. Theer isn't a honnerabler family nor t' Cockill's i' all Yorkshire. We gotten what they call a family tree on 'em hangin' up ower t' chimbley piece i' t' little parlour. They goa back reight away to—nay, I doan't know wheerabouts i' t' history book it is—long afore owd King Henry and his wives, onnyway. Theer wor a Cockill 'at wor mayor o' this varry town i' t' time o' Charles t' First—John Cockill they called him—it's down on t' family tree."

"Why, there you are, you see!" said Mr. Carter. "John Henry inherits great gifts from both sides. These old yeoman families——"

"My family," continued Mr. Tonkinson, "is as owd as t' Cockills. We used to fratch a bit ower that theer, did t' missis an' me; but I bested her, 'cos they hev' all t' owd registers o' t' parish i' our vestry, an' theer wor Tonki'sons i' t' place when registers wor first started, an' that's a bonny piece sin.'"

"Anybody could see that John Henry is well bred," said Mr. Carter. "Old blood always tells. By the bye, the young lady's

father comes of a good old stock—as old as yours, I should think.”

“What! James Bland, t’ publican? Naäy, for sewre!” exclaimed Mr. Tonkinson.

“Yes,” said Mr. Carter. “He came here the other day about buying a bit of property, and I had to look up the registers of the parish that he comes from. His folk have been there for hundreds of years.”

“Dear-a me!” said Mr. Tonkinson. “Why, I allus did say ’at yon lass had a high bred look about her. Shoo’s a high stepper—onnybody could see that theer.”

“Of course, John Henry would never have thought of marrying beneath him,” said Mr. Carter, reflectively. “He’s got the Tonkinson and Cockill common sense, has John Henry.”

Mr. Tonkinson rubbed the end of his nose.

“Of course, if shoo’s gotten a bit of a pedigree’ like,” he remarked, after a brief silence, “it alters t’ case a good deal. Owt ’at can bring a pedigree wi’ it’s desarvin’ o’ consideration—I couldn’t abide ’at John

Henry should iver wed wi' one o' theäse here mushroom lot 'at springs up out o' t' muck."

"Just so," said Mr. Carter.

Mr. Tonkinson rose and made his way to the door.

"I'll away home," he said, with his hand on the knob. "I mun hev' a bit o' talk to t' owd woman. I'll wish ye good-day."

"Good-day, Mr. Tonkinson," said the solicitor. "A pleasant ride."

Mr. Tonkinson closed the door behind him and walked slowly down the passage towards the street. Before he reached the Market Place he stopped, and, turning round, went back to Mr. Carter's door, opened it a few inches, and introduced his nose and eyes to the solicitor's notice.

"Ye'll understand," he said, nodding solemnly at Mr. Carter, "ye'll understand 'at John Henry must ha' known about t' pedigree all along. It mak's a deal o' difference, does t' pedigree!"

THE END'

MR LIGHTOWLER'S ESCAPE





## MR. LIGHTOWLER'S ESCAPE

AT the rise of the road near Dead Man's Copse, Mr. Lightowler, who had obligingly offered me a lift in his pony-trap on my way home from Sicaster market, drew rein, and pointed with the butt end of his whip at a red roofed cottage which stands in a little hollow a hundred yards away from the point where the highwayman was hanged in chains.

"I hear they've gotten a new babby theer," he said. "It arrived t' last neet—a lass, it wor. That's t' ninth. An' they're all on 'em alive, and t' owdest's nobbut ten year owd."

"A flourishing sort of family," I remarked.

"Now, tak' a bit o' noätice!" said Mr. Lightowler. "If they goa on i' that theer way they'll hev to keep a tailor and a

shoemaker on t' premises. Howiver, them 'at likes that sort o' life's welcome to it—it wo'dn't suit me."

" I think you have never been married ? " I said, diffidently.

" Noe ! " replied Mr. Lightowler, rounding his mouth. " Noe ! An' doesn't mean to be, neyther. But——" he paused and jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the cottage, " theer wor a time when I hed thowts o' t' married state. It wor allus considered at I wor bahn to wed her."

" What ? the lady who—the mother of the ninth ? "

" T' saäme woman," said Mr. Lightowler. " Sarah Jowitt as now is—Sarah Burdock as shoo wor then."

" Dear me ! " said I. " I had no idea ——"

" It wor afore ye come to live i' this part o' t' country," said Mr. Lightowler. " Shoo'd been wed afore, hed Sarah. Shoo wor Sarah Gough at t' first—her an' me used to court when we wor young 'uns.

Of course it cam' to nowt, did that theer; it wor nowt but lad-and-lass wark."

"And she married somebody else?" I said.

"Shoo wed owd Burdock, t' miller. Ye see," said Mr. Lightowler, confidentially, "it wor like this here—me an' Sarah (Gough, as shoo wor at that time) we'd been keepin' company for happen three or fower year—shoo wor i' sarvice at owd Mestur Burdock's. An' one day shoo comes to me and shoo says, 'Now, then, art ta bahn to put t' spurrin's (banns of marriage) up or noa?'—'cause if thou isn't t' maister wants me to wed him. An', of course, it wor out o' t' question wor that theer. I wor nobbut a lad o' two-and-twenty year owd i' them days. 'Naay, I says, 'I'm noan bahn to enter into t' matterimomial condition yet awhile, mi lass,' I says. 'If thou wants to get wed to t' owd miller,' I says, 'thou can suit thisen.'"

"And did she marry him?" I inquired, inconsequently.

"Aye, shoo married t' owd lad, reight

enough," answered Mr. Lightowler. "But shoo gat nowt at it—t' owd ancient lived five year o' t' efter they wor wed, and when he deed he left next to nowt. Theer wor one blessin' about t' job," Mr. Lightowler added reflectively. "Theer wor noa bairns."

"And so she became Mrs. Burdock, and afterwards a pretty young widow?" I said.

"Shoo wor a well looking young woman, theer's noa doubt," answered Mr. Lightowler. "An' of course, shoo wor nobbut a young lass, as you might term it, when shoo became a widow woman. Three-an'-twenty shoo'd be at that time."

"I should have thought," said I, "that Mrs. Burdock, with her added experience, would have made a suitable partner for you."

"Why, I thowt soä misen," replied Mr. Lightowler. "Of course, when shoo wed wi' t' owd miller, it wor all ower atween us; but when shoo lost him we wor varry sooin courtin' strong ageean. Shoo wor a nice young woman to keep comp'ny

wi'," Mr. Lightowler added, with a note of pleasant recollection in his voice, "varry nice."

"Why didn't you marry her, then?" I made bold to inquire.

"Why, now, ye see, theer wor a many things to think on," replied Mr. Lightowler, steadying his pony. "I wor nob-but twenty-seven year owd, when all wor said and done; and it's a youngish age for marryin', is that theer, and shoo wor nowt but a lass, for all 'at shoo'd been wed afore."

"Slow and steady seems to be your motto," I remarked.

"An' a varry good 'un an' all," answered Mr. Lightowler. "Ye see, I wanted to mak' sure afore I set out on what ye might term a v'yage o' discovery. A man 'ats niver been wed nat'rally wants to know summat about what sort on a state o' life it is afore he enters into it."

"But Mrs. Burdock could have initiated——"

"That's all varry weel," said Mr. Lightowler, "but I wanted to mak' sure wi'out

onny 'nitiation fro' her. 'Cos ye see, shoo'd been theer afore, and shoo wor nat'rally prejudiced i' favour o' t' married state. It's fair cappin' how them widows inclines to matterimony ! ”

“ And in the end,” I began, somewhat impatiently, “ in the end, you——”

“ Naay,” answered Mr. Lightowler, “ i' t' end I did nowt. It wor her 'at did it—Sarah Burdock as shoo then wor. Ye see, we courted varry strong for happen five year o' t' efter t' owd miller croaked (died), and shoo behaved hersen varry fair all t' time, considerin' shoo wor a widow. Of course, shoo wor a bit restless now and then, but I allus telled her I'd wed her some day, and I wo'd ha' done if shoo'd nobbut hed a bit o' patience.”

“ I see,” said I. “ She thought you were keeping her too long, and so she ——”

“ Why,” said Mr. Lightowler, “ I doan't know what wimmen wants, but shoo wor nobbut a young woman o' eight and twenty when t' end cam.' Ye see, I had to goa down into t' South o' England for



a month or two on a bit o' business, an of course I tewk (took) what they call a tender farewell o' her. 'Now then,' she says, 'art ta bahn to put t' spurrin's in when thou comes back hoäme?' she says, ''cos I'm stalled (tired) o' bein' single,' shoo says, 'and if thou weern get agate (started) o' bein' wed,' shoo says, 'I'll fin' some chap 'at will—so I'm tellin' tha.' 'Now, then, bide a bit,' I says. 'We'll consider on it when I come back ageean.' I'm sewre that wor a sensible remark to mak'," concluded Mr. Lightowler.

"And what happened?" I inquired.

Mr. Lightowler shook his head.

"Shoo treated me varry bad," he replied, gravely. "Varry bad indeed. I browt her a present when I come back thro' t' South—a henkercher box it wor, set round wi' shells—I 'warded fifteenpence on't—and I tewk it up to t' cottage wheer shoo lived. An' lo! and behold, if I didn't fin' her sittin' on Jaämes Jowitt's knee, and 'im cuddlin' on her like a soft young lad! 'Now then,' I says, 'what's t'meanin'

o' this? I browt yer a henkercher box,' I says, and ho'ds it out to her."

"Well?" says I, Mr. Lightowler pausing at this point. "What then?" Mr. Lightowler scratched his head.

"Naäy!" he said. "I wor fair amazed! Shoo jumped up offen Jaames Jowitt's knee, and shoo run me out o' t' cottage and chucked t' henkercher box efter me into t' garden. 'Tak' thi hook,' shoo says. 'I neyther want thee nor thi henkercher boxes.' And soa I comed away."

The pony stopped at Mr. Lightowler's gate. We descended from the cart.

"That's eleven year sin'," said Mr. Lightowler, bunching up the reins. "And, as I said afore, theer's been a new 'un ivery year. Efter all's said and done, we've all on us a deal to be thankful for!"

THE END

THE DUODECIMO

## THE DUODECIMO

THE second hand bookseller—his shop was a decrepit hand-barrow standing in a side street that debouched on the ever-odorous Liffey—emptied the contents of a dirty sack into the penny box with the air of one who offers cheap bread to a starving multitude. He looked at me out of the corner of a roguish Irish eye, and seeing that I smiled a little, he permitted himself to wink at something across the street in a solemn and knowing fashion.

“ And ’tis a wonder,” said he, “ where all the ould books come from at all. Sure, there’s a feast for them that’s inclined to literature—the books is as plenty as oranges in the ould women’s baskets round Nelson’s Pillar.”

“ You should sell them as the old women sell the oranges, then,” said I. “ Two for

three halfpence is about the worth of them."

He threw the empty sack aside and spat on the pavement.

"Begorrah!" he answered. "Ye can have any three of them for twopence, and repate the dose as often as ye wish. And if ye'd like to set up a library, sure I'm open to an offer, so I am!"

I laughed at the absurdity of the man. The collection of stuff on the barrow was as frowsy a matter as I had ever set eyes on. It seemed to represent the sweepings of some corner of a garret wherein dust and dirt had steadily accumulated for scores of slowly moving years. Some of the dust and a little of the dirt had been rubbed away by the process of removal, and the bundling out of the sack into the penny box; what remained suggested awful possibilities of a previous state. It required little more than a worn-out imagination to invest the collection with many potentialities—fleas amongst them—and on a hot day I should have moved speedily to the weather side. But this day was of an unfriendly sort—cold, nipping, and characteristic of March

—and if there were fleas in the battered pamphlets, the dog's-eared books, the rake-hell odds and ends of literature, they were like to remain snug and warm rather than hop into active service. And so I stood at the corner of the barrow, staring idly at the penny box. It was just as good to stare at as anything else in Dublin at that moment, and I could speculate about its contents as gaily as about College Green or the Castle. For every old book is a memorial of somebody and something, and could tell rare tales if it had the power, and——

“ Bedad ! ” said the vendor, breaking in on my thoughts, “ I'm thinking I'd know as much as a Fellow of Trinity if I was to digest all that lot, so I would—there's a power of learning in that same.”

Then he went ten yards away, to lean against a wall and smoke a pipe in company with two jarvies whose cars stood idle on the quay side, and passers-by might have been forgiven if they had taken me for the proprietor of the barrow and its contents. For having nothing else to do I remained

there, staring at the mass of seeming rubbish, and speculating about it, and my imagination got to work upon the component parts of it. And after a time, believing that I could not very well damage what was already as battered and unwholesome a collection of waifs and strays as you might find anywhere, I lifted my walking stick and stirred the mass up as boys stir an ants' nest. I was reminded as I did this of a bazaar which I had once been persuaded to attend. They had there a matter called a bran-pie, and to share in its delights and mysteries you paid some small sum, and were then permitted to plunge your hand into the bran, and to make a grab at anything that lurked therein. You might seize upon something of more or less value—you might grasp nothing but bran.

Stirring up the penny box with my walking stick was like taking your luck at the bran-pie. There was a sweet fascination, a delicately titillating joy about it. Somehow I had a sort of unholy notion that I was going to turn up something good. It was quite immaterial that my memory im-



pressed upon me the fact that I had frequently, during twenty years of flirtation with old book-shops, believed myself to be on the point of making a real find—a black letter broadsheet, an Elzevir, a rare pamphlet—and had never done so. On this occasion I felt that something was going to happen. And I stuck my walking stick deep into the tattered mass and upheaved the patient, ill-treated things, as confidently and as remorselessly as the prospector shovels up earth and stones in order to reach the nugget of pure gold.

The innocent walking stick brought to the top a small book, the mere sight of which made me feel quite sick. I knew it to be something uncommon at first sight—a scion of the Royal family amongst books which had strayed into low company, and contracted the worst and vilest of their habits. How royal it was I did not, of course, immediately recognise ; it was sufficient to me at first to bow to its gentility. I approached it with reverent fingers, and drew it to me. A duodecimo, bound in purple calf, ornamented back and front

with an elaborate design in rich gilt—that was all I cared to see just then—I did not even glance at the title page. I glanced at the stall keeper with much more interest. He was quite happy with the two jarvies ; they were all happy, as all Irishmen are when they have nothing to do. Would he really allow me to carry away this lovely specimen of some great binder's craft for—a penny ? It seemed impossible, and for a moment I thought I must be dreaming. But I could smell the Liffey, and that calmed me, and so I came to remember the man's prodigal offer—three books for twopence. And with as joyous a heart as ever Jonathan Oldbuck of Monkburns carried away from a bookshop, I hastily picked out the two most respectable volumes I could find, sandwiched the duodecimo between them, and walking boldly to the vendor, tendered him twopence.

I was surprised, I am sure, that he accepted the twopence. But it was a hearty acceptance—he not only took the coins, but thanked me for my patronage, and to show that he estimated it at its right value, he

spat on the copper before transferring it to his pocket.

It seemed to me, however, that the luck was mine. I knew something about old bindings, and I knew that I had got a treasure tucked away between the "Treatise on Trigonometry" and the "Essay on the Art of Castrametation," which I had selected as companions for my duodecimo. I dropped the companions over the wall into the river before I had gone many yards, and put the duodecimo in my breast pocket—careless of what live stock it might contain. And presently hiding myself in the corner of a smoking-room in a quiet hotel, I drew it out, and we became formally introduced to each other.

How it had ever come amongst such low down company as that in which I had discovered it was a marvel. After dusting and polishing it carefully with a spare handkerchief, it began to smile upon me with a rare sweetness, and its charms, like those of a worthy mistress, improved vastly upon more intimate acquaintance. Free of its livery of shame—to wit, the dust which had

been forced upon it, it revealed itself in the nude as a clean limbed, fair skinned beauty, miraculously free of blemish in spite of many unspeakable adventures. It was, of course, its exterior qualities which chiefly attracted me ; I have now forgotten what the book itself was about—Contes Nouvelles or Romantiques, or perhaps Drolatiques—something of that witty and pleasant sort, at any rate. The only thing which had any great attraction for me beyond the superb binding was the date on the title page. It appeared from this that my treasure had been printed in Paris in the year 1684. I was inclined to think that it had fallen into the hands of the great craftsman who had furnished it with its coat of purple calf somewhere about the same time.

I turned the duodecimo over and over as I sat there meditating. Its purple calf binding was almost original in its freshness, the elaborate gilt devices on back and front were fresh too. They were beautiful devices, and there was much use made in them of the figures of bears. They were, in fact, reproductions of some great man's coat-of-

arms. I wanted to know whose coat-of-arms it was, and who the binder was—there was nothing within the cover to reveal his identity. But he had certainly been a great man in his day. And I was a lucky one in mine—to buy a specimen of his craft for a penny—no, for a fraction less.

I am somewhat ashamed to say that much as I loved the duodecimo from an aesthetic delight in its clothing, my principal admiration for it sprung from the fact that I saw a possibility of making money out of it. And I wanted the money somewhat badly, for I had been stranded in Dublin for several days, expecting a remittance from England which seemed to be a long time in coming. In fact, I was within sight of my last half-crown when I came across the duodecimo, and the reason why I had lingered near the second hand book-seller's barrow was that it was just as good a place as any other wherein to while away unprofitable time. But I knew there was money in the little book as soon as I set eyes on it, and so I had walked into the nearest hotel and expended sixpence on a

drop of John Jameson's, wherein to drink success to what lay before the duodecimo and me. It was disheartening to have to part company with so fair a thing as soon as we had met, and she had been so lovingly embraced, but need is a stronger thing than fancy, and I was going to sell her.

I put the book in my pocket again, finished the whisky, buttoned my coat and strode out with a heart full of resolution. I marched straight to Grafton Street, and walked boldly into the shop of a highly respectable firm of booksellers. Everything within bespoke the higher walks of bookselling life, and there was a Bishop in gaiters and apron looking over the new novels piled up on the counter. Also there were several scrupulously attired assistants, and one of them condescended to favour me with his attention. I pulled out the duodecimo, laid it on the palm of my hand, and exhibited it to him, pretty much as the children of Israel exhibit a rare diamond to each other in the purlieus of Hatton Garden.

“Could you give me any idea of the value



of this little book ? ” I said with great politeness and a child-like trustfulness in his powers.

He was surprised. He was also puzzled. I indicated the beauties of the binding, with an index finger eloquent of many things ; I opened the book, and showed him the date on the title page. He pursed his lips, elevated his eyebrows, looked as wise as was possible under the circumstances, and after coughing two or three times, requested another assistant to come to his aid.

“ The binding,” said one of them after they had gazed at the duodecimo as little girls gaze at dolls wherein unfamiliar contrivances have been secreted, “ appears to be remarkably fresh.”

I gazed at him out of a slanting eye.

“ Your observation,” I said, “ does great credit to your powers of discernment. The binding is remarkably fresh.”

“ Of course,” said the other, “ such a book might be worth a good deal. But it might not.”

“ I am inclined to agree with the first of your remarks, but not with the second,”



I responded. "The book is valuable. What I wish to know is, do you recognise the work as that of any great Irish craftsman in the art of binding?"

But there was no one in the entire establishment who could answer that pertinent question with any satisfaction to me. As a great favour I allowed the head person to submit the duodecimo to the Bishop, who hummed and hahed over it and betrayed a decided covetousness which he wished to indulge in to the extent of, I think, a guinea. Eventually, after contriving to impress upon the whole staff my own feeling that I had done them a great favour in allowing them to see the duodecimo, I left the shop as wise as when I entered it.

I had walked a few paces up the street when I was aware of sounds behind me which appeared to have some relation to myself. I looked round; the Bishop was hastening in my direction. He waved his umbrella; I paused, then stepped to meet him.

"As regards the binder," he said, "now, I have only known of one person in the

world who could be said to possess a real knowledge of bookbinding as a craft in this country, and it is possible that he may be dead. But if he is alive"—he paused, and looked at me attentively.

"If he is alive, I should thank your lordship to favour me with his name and address," I responded.

The Bishop knitted his brows, and planted his hands firmly on the handsome gold knob, elaborately chased and engraved, which surmounted his umbrella. The fashionable tides of Grafton Street swept by him as waters by a rock ; he was a man of weight, and I sheltered in his protecting shade.

"His name ?" he said, musingly. "Now I think his name was, or is, as the case may be, M'Naghten. Yes, I am sure of it—M'Naghten—Mr. M'Naghten. I myself am a collector, in my small way, and I once had occasion to ask Mr. M'Naghten's advice on a question which I could not solve. I found him interesting, and full of rare erudition on the subject of bindings. That was—let me see—ah, it must be quite ten years ago.

So that Mr. M'Naghten may be dead, as I have already remarked. ”

“ If your lordship would add to your kindness by telling me where Mr. M'Naghten—if alive—may be found,” I said, “ I should feel—”

“ Just so ; just so ! ” he interrupted. “ Now, I think the address was some number in Upper William Street, but what number—”

I took the opportunity of interrupting him.

“ I will find him if he is still alive,” I said. “ I am greatly obliged to your lordship.”

“ Not at all, not at all ! ” he exclaimed, quite heartily. “ Quite a pleasure, I'm sure. If you—er—should discover from Mr. M'Naghten that the little book is of value, and its binding the work of an Irish craftsman, I should be glad to—to—that is, if you do not put an impossible price upon it. I am the Bishop of Abbeyleix.”

I bowed gravely.

“ Your lordship,” I replied, “ shall have the first refusal of the book, after I have ascertained its value,” and not wishing to

waste further time in talk, I lifted my hat very respectfully to him and sheered away. He seemed sorry to let me—or the book—leave him, and there was a certain amount of ruefulness in the otherwise cheery nod with which he favoured me. I had seen from the first that he belonged to the class of amiable old gentlemen who would sell their souls for a rare book, a bit of Waterford glass, or a Chippendale chair.

I found Upper William Street (if I am to speak the exact truth this is not its real name) without any difficulty. It was like a good many streets in certain once fashionable parts of Dublin. It cried out loudly that it had once seen better days. Its houses were of the Georgian style, built of red brick that had mellowed with age, and it was easy to see that they had all been town houses of the nobility and quality in the days when Ireland had a Parliament sitting in College Green. Every house had an imposing doorway, with many steps leading up to it, and before each stood a couple of ironwork cressets, wherein they used to put oil lamps in those blessed times which knew

nothing of either gas or electric lighting. Some of the houses were still of a high respectability. I noticed the names of at least two knights (or they might have been baronets) on well worn doorplates ; some were as dilapidated and forlorn as a human dwelling long untenanted can be. The street itself was a curiosity that deserved considerable examination, but I wasted no time upon it—I wanted to find Mr. M'Naghten.

I got wind of my quarry at the tea and wine merchant's shop at the extreme corner of the street—Mr. M'Naghten resided at No. 21. That was to say, he resided there if he was still alive.

“ Wouldn't you have known if he was dead ? ” said I to Mr. Halloran, tea and wine merchant. “ It is only a few doors away, is it not ? ”

“ Faix ! ” he said, laughing, “ I didn't see the ould gentleman this three year, and may be only once in ten years before that.”

I went to No. 21, feeling that Mr. M'Naghten was something of a mystery. And when I came to his presumable dwelling, I won-

dered if it really was a dwelling, for of all the God-forsaken, desolate places I have ever seen, it was the most notable. There was no sign of life in the windows—black gaps they were in the blank wall, and the incrustations of a score of years were thick upon them. The steps had not been washed for a generation—there was something in the appearance of the door which suggested that it would never open. I think that most people, standing outside that house, would have said that it was untenanted. I think, too, that it is no idle boast on my part to say that I knew that it had a tenant. There was not a sign of life about it, but I felt that life stirred within it before I went up the steps. My first doubt as to whether it was inhabited had changed into an uncanny, uncomfortable certainty that something lurked inside it. I believe I began to feel—in a queer, vague fashion—alarmed ; if not alarmed, uncomfortable.

There was a bell, and I rang it vigorously—once, twice, thrice. I heard a faint, very faint, tinkle somewhere far away in the recesses behind the heavy door, but no hand



opened to me. I stood there a long time, and at last had made up my mind to go away, and had turned to face the street, when I heard a ghostly whisper that seemed to sibilate close to my ear.

“ Well ? ”

I almost jumped out of my boots. I looked up, down, around, and saw nothing. The word was repeated—still in a sharp, sibilant whisper, almost as if some one had whistled it rather than spoken it, and this time there was a ring of impatience in it. I looked at the door, and then I noticed for the first time that a little sliding panel had been drawn back, and that from behind a network of rusty iron an eye was watching me. I am not ashamed to say that I went down the four steps into the street about as smartly as if somebody had let loose an earthquake under my feet. I *was* frightened ; I was shaken. So would you have been. But I pulled myself together with an enormous effort, and went up the steps again as calmly as if I were the young man who calls for orders for the butcher, and I said, commonplacely :—



“ Does Mr. M’Naghten live here ? ”

As I said it, I forced myself to face the inquisitorial eye—not an easy thing to do, considering the circumstances. To look a man straight in the face is one thing ; to return the steadfast gaze of an eye, examining you through a small *grille* of rusty iron bars is another. And there was something in this eye, a cold, blue eye, very keen and piercing, which upset my composure. But I managed to stare at it with a reasonable amount of steadfastness.

“ What do you want of Mr. M’Naghten ? ” inquired the ghostly voice.

“ Well, I—the fact is, I was recommended to ask his advice about a book—or, rather, about the binding of a book.”

“ The binding of a book ? And by whom were you recommended to apply to Mr. M’Naghten, if one may ask ? ”

There was something satirical, or mocking, or contemptuous about the voice. Whatever it was, it nettled me.

“ Oh,” I began, and was half minded to go away. But instead of following this impulse, I fired the Bishop’s name at the

person behind the door with as much emphasis as I could summon. I fancied I heard a dry laugh—the sort of laugh that might have come from a skeleton.

“Dear me!” said the voice. “And where is the book?”

“Here, in my pocket,” I answered savagely.

“Show it to me.”

“How on earth can I do that through the door?” I demanded.

“Hold it up in front of the *grille*,” said the voice, as peremptorily as if its owner had been a drill sergeant and I a recruit.

I really wanted to know all that I could about the value of the binding, so I smothered my indignation at this cavalier treatment, and drawing the book from my pocket, held it up for the eye’s inspection, turning it about from side to side.

“There,” I said, “that’s it!”

I thought I heard a sort of half-repressed exclamation. I fancied that the eye gleamed upon me less fiercely. Anyway, the voice addressed me in gentler tones.

“I will open the door,” it said.

There were many stout bolts and bars on that door, and it was further secured by a mighty chain which clanked and rattled as it was taken down. Something in the creaking of the bolts, the screeching of the keys, as they were turned in the locks, gave me the impression that the door had not been opened for some time—the impression was confirmed when a cloud of dust flew from the lintels. But I forgot all that on the instant, for the opening of the door made me acquainted with Mr. M'Naghten.

He revealed himself to my eyes as one of the oddest mortals I had ever seen—a tall, very thin man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age, I thought, whose spare form was wrapped up in a garment which was half dressing-gown and half cassock, and fashioned of some rusty brown stuff not unlike that which the Franciscan monks wore for their habits. A small skull cap of the same stuff was drawn tightly over the back of his head, his feet were encased in Eastern slippers, bright red in colour, and ornamented at the tips with gold arabesques. But I saw these minor details in a swift flash

of the perception. I was chiefly observant of Mr. M'Naghten's face. It was of a curious pallor—ivory white in tint—and made one think of him as a human vitality that had been drained of blood ; it was, indeed, so bloodless that you could not trace the veins on the temples. His chin, cheeks, and upper lip were sparsely covered with straggling, uneven tufts of snow white hair—he was a white thing altogether, but in the midst of the whiteness burned a pair of keen, penetrating eyes, and in them there was no sign of age.

Mr. M'Naghten smiled. It was a polite smile, accompanied by a courteous bow, and beckoned me to enter. I stepped into a hall of considerable size, paved in black and white marble, and furnished with a good deal of heavy old oak. As I entered he closed the door, and drew some of the bolts into their hasps again.

“ Please to follow me,” he said, and turned towards a staircase at the rear of the hall. I followed him without a word—his personality seemed to act upon me with strange power. He led me up two flights of

stairs, past several closed doors, into a room at the back of the house—a room which was literally lined with books, arranged in antique cases. In the rapid glance which I cast around me as I entered it, I saw that the books were all old, and that most of them were conspicuous for the beauty and value of their bindings. I saw, too, that the apartment was much more comfortable and even luxurious than I should have thought the house would afford ; there was a bright fire burning in the grate, a deep easy chair was drawn up before it ; there was also a pleasant odour of aromatic tobacco and of Turkish coffee in the atmosphere. It was plain that Mr. M'Naghten was sybaritic in his tastes.

“ My services are at your command,” he said politely. “ You will pardon me for keeping you at the door. I am a good deal of a recluse, and do not readily brook interruption. But the book.”

I placed the duodecimo in his hands. It seemed to me that he received it with a good deal of delight—he carried it over to the window (which, in strong contrast to

those in the front of the house, was spotless in its brilliantly polished panes), and examined it with great care. And after a few minutes he came back to the middle of the room, and pointing me to a seat, said in very polite fashion :—

“ Do you mind telling me how you became possessed of this book, and what you wish to do with it ? ”

I have already said that I felt strangely under the man's power. Something in his direct gaze seemed to force one to speak. Within ten minutes I had told him all that I have here set down—how I had found the book, why I wished to sell it, and all the rest.

“ Just so,” said he. “ Well, I think I can tell you a good deal. This is a rare find—as you surmise—on account of the binding. My own impression is that this book was bound by William Norman, a famous Irish craftsman who used to style himself ‘ Binder to the Duke of Ormonde.’ ”

I bowed my head ; my eyes asked for still more information.

“ You are not aware, perhaps,” he con-



tinued, "that in the seventeenth century there were four great Irish binders who were princes of their art, but whose work we cannot definitely recognise nowadays, because the practice of inserting the binder's name within a cover was not known in their time. They were William Wright, Nathaniel Gun, Samuel Adey, and William Norman. I feel sure that this little duodecimo was bound by the last named."

"May I ask why?" I said.

"Certainly you may. You perceive that the design on the back and front of the volume is the coat-of-arms of the Ormonde family."

"No," I said. "I did not know that it was."

"It is so, nevertheless," he continued. "Now the book was printed in 1684; that was about the time in which William Norman flourished; William Norman styled himself—and was—bookbinder to the Duke of Ormonde; the Ormonde arms ornament the book; *ergo*, I opine that the book was bound by William Norman."



“ I think your process of reasoning very strong, sir,” I said. “ Pray, what value would you put upon the book ? ”

He shook his head.

“ Ah ! ” he said. “ That is a big question. It is in a certain sense, unique. I myself possess, I suppose, the finest collection of bindings in this country, but I have nothing like this. Let me show you a few things, just to illustrate my meaning. But first a cigarette, and a cup of coffee ! You will find both good—the real thing in tobacco and in genuine Mocha.”

He handed me a box of cigarettes, and presently gave me a cup of the most delicious coffee I had ever tasted. Come, I thought, this is no dry-as-dust curmudgeon, after all, but a good natured old party who believes in creature comfort ; and I settled down in a comfortable chair to enjoy myself. Mr. M’Naghten lighted a cigarette himself, smoking it out of a long amber holder, and replenished his own cup. He was about to take a chair near my own, and to begin some remarks upon the bindings of two or three small volumes which he had selected from a

case, when a sudden thought appeared to strike him. He laid the books aside, and going over to a little cabinet, produced a Venetian flask wherein gleamed a golden tinted liquid. This, with two quaintly cut glasses, he set on a little table between us.

"Take a liqueur with your coffee," he said, filling my glass. "This is a rare cordial. I am quite sure that no one else in Ireland possesses it, and I don't suppose that more than one or two persons in England can give their guests a spoonful of it. I procure an occasional flask of it from an old friend in Florence, a bibliophile, like myself. You like it?"

The liqueur was unlike anything that I had ever tasted before. It was a fire that did not burn—a sort of spiritual essence that seemed to permeate the mental fibres. It communicated a heavenly intoxication, and yet it made the brain sharper, clearer, more acute at the same time.

"I never tasted anything like it," I exclaimed. "It is wonderful!"

"A secret of the old monks," he said indifferently. "Compounded from herbs—

they had wonderful knowledge of herbal properties. Now, I will tell you about the bookbinders' art in this country ; but are you pressed for time ? ”

“ On the contrary,” I hastened to reply. “ I have nothing wherewith to occupy myself,” and I told him, in a few words, all about my business in Dublin, my waiting for a remittance, and the rest of it. He seemed to understand everything quite well.

“ It is not often that I have a visitor,” he said. “ And a little conversation on a pet subject does one good sometimes. As you are interested in binding as a craft—as a great art, rather—we will talk of binding. Now, here are specimens of——”

He began to talk in a clever, interesting way. I have a clear, accurate remembrance of the earlier part of our conversation. I could write it all down, but it was of such a technical nature that it would have no interest for you. Up to a certain point, I say, I remember everything—after that certain point—nothing. The last thing I remember, so far as Mr. M’Naghten is con-

cerned, was the framework on the side of a volume which he placed in my hands for the purpose of illustrating an argument he was then making—after that came a long blank.

It must have been about noon when I called at Mr. M'Naghten's house ; I do not know what time I left it. The next thing I remember was a loud knocking at the door of my bed-room in the hotel where I had been staying for several days, and then the entrance of the boots with a registered letter. This was the arrival of the expected remittance, and it was about half-past eight o'clock next morning—that is, I suppose it was next morning. For, in plain truth, I had no recollection of any of the events of the day before. The second hand bookseller and his barrow ; the duodecimo ; the Bishop ; Mr. M'Naghten and his hospitality, all these things were completely blotted out of my memory. The only thing that concerned me at all was the pleasant fact that the registered letter contained twenty pounds in bank notes, and that I could now leave for England.

I was not averse to an hour or two's delay, and I decided to cross by the night mail ; and having an idle day before me I breakfasted very leisurely, lounged about in the smoking-room of the hotel until noon, and then strolled out into the streets, to kill time by looking at the shops and the people. I was not prepared for anything in the nature of a surprise, but I was fated to encounter one ere I had been out half-an-hour.

I was staring into the window of a shop at the corner of Nassau Street, when I felt a light and very confidential tap on my shoulder. I am a man of small stature ; I looked round and up, and set eyes on a very large, dignified person in episcopal habiliments, who was smiling at me in a fashion which seemed to me distinctly fatuous. I gazed at him in blank astonishment—almost in terror—for he was very large and impressive.

“ I trust Mr. M’Naghten was able to afford you the information you were in search of ? ” he said in that half-kindly,

half-patronising fashion which some great ecclesiastical dignitaries seem to affect. "That is, of course, if you found him. Did you?"

I stood open-mouthed, staring at him.

"I—I—really, I—that is—" I began confusedly, and then, feeling that I was making an idiot of myself, I summoned up strength to say, as intelligently as I could, "I think your lordship is making a mistake."

His smile suddenly changed into a frown of doubt and perplexity; he lifted a fat white hand to his double chin, and scratched it.

"Dear me," he said. "A mistake? No, surely not! Had we not the pleasure of meeting in Messrs. ——'s shop (he indicated a bookshop close by) yesterday morning?"

"Upon my honour," I said, "I never saw your lordship before in my life!"

He shifted his hand from his chin to his ear, and scratched that.

"This is indeed a strange thing," he said. "I surely cannot be mistaken in saying that



I met you in the shop there yesterday morning ; that you were anxious to ascertain some facts respecting the binding of an old book, and that I advised you to apply to a certain Mr. M'Naghten, an authority on such matters ? Surely, surely ! ”

“ I can only say that your lordship is strangely mistaken,” I replied. “ I have no knowledge of any of the facts you mention.”

“ I am the Bishop of Abbeyleix,” he said, appealingly. “ Don't you remember you were to give me the first refusal of the duodecimo which you wanted to sell ? ”

“ But I never had any duodecimo to sell ! ” I exclaimed. “ And as I have already said, I never met your lordship in my life. ”

He stepped back a pace and regarded me gravely. I looked at him with equal attention, mixed with a perplexity which began to be reflected on his ample countenance.

“ This is the strangest thing I have ever known in the course of my life ! ” he said presently. “ I cannot doubt the evidence of



my own senses. Do you deny that you spoke to me in the bookseller's shop across the street there yesterday morning, and that I——”

His tone began to assume a dictatorial quality which made me quick to interrupt him.

“ I should like to know what right your lordship has to ask me whether I deny anything or not ! ” I retorted. “ I have already told you that you are a perfect stranger to me, and you are now beginning to intrude upon me in an impertinent fashion.”

He became very red ; I bowed politely, and was for turning away. But he stretched out an appealing umbrella.

“ Stop, sir ! stop ! ” he entreated. “ For the sake of my—my peace of mind, would you object to stepping into Messrs. ——’s shop with me for one moment ? No man likes to doubt the evidence of his own senses.”

“ I will oblige your lordship with pleasure,” I responded, and I followed in his

wake across the street and into the shop which he entered. It was as a foreign country to me. I had no recollection of having ever entered it before.

The Bishop was labouring under great excitement. He brought up every assistant he could espy, and arraigned them against me. One and all agreed with him. I had entered the shop on the previous morning ; had talked with them and him on the subject of the binding of a duodecimo volume which I had produced from my pocket, and had subsequently been seen in conversation with his lordship a few yards away in the street. They were all certain on these points. But I was just as certain on mine.

“ The whole thing is a simple case of mistaken identity,” I said. “ It is evident that I possess a double in Dublin. As for myself, there is my card and my address in London—for the last four days I have resided at the Gresham Hotel.”

The folk of the book-shop were distinctly puzzled. The Bishop, who accepted my

card, was in a state of strange perturbation. I left him arguing the matter with the manager, and I am quite sure, from the chilling glance which he bestowed upon me, that he had come to the conclusion that I had robbed him of a bargain by selling the book he talked about to somebody else.

All that happened several years ago ; all that I remembered of it until yesterday was the amusing encounter with the Bishop on the morning of my departure from Dublin. But chancing to return to Dublin a few days ago, I went yesterday into the Science and Art Museum in Kildare Street, and there in the gallery I came across a case of examples of Irish bookbinding. In the top left hand corner of this case I saw the duodecimo. They have a placard there, describing it, and the description runs word for word with what was said to me about it by Mr. M'Naghten. The sight of it woke some dormant faculty in my brain. I suddenly recalled all the incidents of the day I had lost—years before.

They say the book was presented to the

Museum by some donor whose name is set forth on a label in the show-case. But it was once mine—for a few hours.

I find that Mr. M'Naghten is now dead. So is the Bishop. Otherwise....

THE END



A COMEDY OF THE GRAND  
CANAL





## A COMEDY OF THE GRAND CANAL

### I.

RALSTON had been kicking his heels, wearing out his patience, and using strong language, not always under his breath, in the Piazza di San Marco, from seven o'clock until nearly eight, and he was still unrewarded for his pains. Overhead was a sky of dazzling blue ; at the head of the square, behind the three tall masts whereon they used to hang the banners of Cyprus and Candia and the Morea, in the days when Venice was a Republic and a proud thing, and where the Italian flag now flaunts on Sundays and festa days, rose the façade of St. Mark's, with its gorgeous colouring, its oriental looking domes, and its bronze horses ; between the masts and the corner of the Palazzo Reale towered the great Campanile, its gilded pinnacle flashing back

the rays of the spring sun. All over the Piazza fluttered the pigeons, descendants of the birds who carried the good news from Candia to Venice seven hundred years ago ; under the colonnades the folk of the shops, the café, and the restaurants were preparing for another day of work and money making ; the air was filled with chatter and sunshine and laughter and the scent of the sea, and everything was full of life and colour and gaiety. At any other time Ralston would have drunk it all in with the greedy eye of the artist. On this particular occasion he stuck his hands still deeper in his pockets, swore softly from time to time, and at intervals stared at the clock above, the gateway at the end of the old Procuratie, noting, with savage dislike of the fact, that the two bronze Vulcans were about to mark the hour of eight upon its face. He, of course, was waiting for a girl, and the girl, of course, was late in keeping the appointment—equally, of course, the fact that she was an hour late would shorten the time they could have together by an hour. It was annoy-

ing, vexatious, disappointing, and Ralston felt that the morning was unsympathetic. It should have surrounded his gloom with its gloom ; there should have been rain in the wind instead of gentle and balmy zephyrs in the air ; the people moving about should have worn long faces instead of cheerful smiles.

All these thoughts vanished like mist before the sunlight when he suddenly caught a glimpse of a familiar gown hurrying towards him. It was with a mighty sense of relief, a smile of child-like thankfulness and outstretched hands that he literally bounded forward to meet the girl he had been waiting for.

“ My darling ! ” he exclaimed, with a fervour that made a waiter who lounged at the door of a café open his eyes and feel a sudden warmth about the region of his heart, “ how late you are ! You said seven, and it is now eight, and we shall have all that time the less. Why are you late ? ”

“ Shall I tell you the real reason ? ” she said, with an arch laugh. “ Well, I didn’t

wake until half-past seven, and I have had to hurry, so you may guess."

"You didn't wake?" he cried almost incredulously. "And I was awake at four o'clock, and out at six, and I've counted every stone in this blessed square since seven."

"How hungry you must be!" she exclaimed, with a side glance at the café. "I'm afraid I am, too."

"That is easily remedied," he answered, leading the way into the café, where the sympathetic waiter stood bowing and smiling. "Here, let's have that corner; it's about the quietest spot I can see."

The girl sat down and drew off her gloves. Ralston, after giving his order to the waiter, sat down opposite her. At that hour the café was almost deserted. He laid his hand on hers; she looked up at him with a quick smile.

"Well, Nellie," he said, with an anxious note in his voice, "was it any good?"

The girl shook her head.

"Not a scrap," she replied. "I seized what seemed to be the psychological mo-

ment, and summoned all my wits and best reasons and soundest arguments. I cajoled, I was bewitching, I was adamantine and yet tender, but it was no good. You are too young, and too poor—especially poor—my unfortunate Dick, and I think my respected parent would like me to espouse one of those Italian noblemen with a mouldy palazzo and a mighty pedigree.”

“They have no money, anyway,” growled Ralston.

“No, but you see they can supply a title. It sounds somewhat enticing—*La Comtesse This*, or *Il Principessa That*. I think either would fit me very well. What do you think, Dick?” she said, glancing at him with laughing eyes.

Ralston regarded her fondly. She was young and fresh and dainty, full of the most alluring charms of young womanhood, and if all the rest of the world had been transmuted into fine gold and set in the scale of his estimation against her, he would have preferred her to all that it would buy for him.

“I think,” he replied, as they set to work

on their coffee and its light adjuncts with the zest of youthful appetites, "I think that there is only one possible name, or style, or title which would fit you, and it is Mrs. Richard Ralston. And that's the style and title you're to bear, my dear."

Miss Helen Parrington laughed.

"How's the change to come about, Dick?" she asked. "After last night I feel sure that the poppa's mind is made up—in fact, I am charged with an ultimatum. Either this has got to stop, or he's going to conduct me homewards to New York, straight off. He puts it like this—You've danced attendance all round, from Nice to Rome, from Rome to Florence, from Florence to Venice, and you've been said 'No' to in every place, and yet you turn up wherever he flies for refuge. I'm a disobedient and wicked daughter—I meet you and talk to you and encourage you—and I am spoiling everything for him. He wants to be at peace here for a while, and then to get some more peace at Milan and Turin, and then in Switzerland, and he knows you'll turn up at every place, and



sigh and swear, and be objectionable generally, just because you can't have your own way. And so you must either clear out or we shall sail for the land of the free."

Ralston frowned, and tried to balance a spoon on the edge of his cup—the process suggesting serious and profound thought.

"If he will give his consent to our engagement," he said, "I'll do anything he likes. And why should he not? I'm not a millionaire, but I'm an English gentleman, and I've a clean record, and about a thousand a year of my own. That would satisfy you, Nellie, wouldn't it?" he added, with a certain wistfulness.

The girl smiled and touched his hand.

"I guess I'm so much in love with you," she said, "that a thousand pounds, a thousand dollars, or a thousand of these ridiculous centesimi are all alike in value to me. But are either of us sane enough just now to reckon such matters up? I'm sure I'm not, and I don't think you are."

"Hang sanity!" he said. "Look here, Nellie, do you want to marry me—do you, do you?"



The girl's face flushed, and she became deeply interested in her coffee.

"Yes—awfully!" she whispered at last.  
"Of course!"

Ralston buttoned his jacket and squared his shoulders.

"Then it's got to be done!" he said.  
"Bless you, darling! do you think it would matter very much if I kissed you over the table? There's only the waiter looking, and I can bribe him to look another way."

"Don't be silly!" she said. "Be serious, Dick. How can it be done? I don't want to disobey my father, and I won't break with you. Is there no way of settling it all in a pleasant, amicable spirit? He says, for instance, that you're a British aristocrat, with no grit, no enterprise, that you're incapable of carrying anything out, and that if your father hadn't left you that thousand a year you'd have qualified as a mute at a funeral."

"He has a sweet and graceful way of describing anybody's peculiarities, qualities and characteristics," said Ralston, quite

unmoved. "Give him my love, dear, and tell him that I feel there are great potentialities dormant in me, and that I believe they are on the point of waking up. 'Incapable of carrying anything out,' am I! Umph—Nellie, dearest, I've always had a sort of notion that I was born to be a great administrator or a mighty general, or something, and I rather feel as if the moment had come. In fact, I think something's going to happen. I'm rather glad you repeated your father's elegant remarks concerning his future son-in-law. Oh, I shall be that, dear, and before long! They've given me a sort of appetite for what I can only call Vast Endeavour. I'm going to do something, just to show Hiram Parrington that I can do it."

"Dick!" she exclaimed. "If you only would, or could! There's nothing he worships so much as the men who do something! It's a perfect mania with him. Oh, do anything! so long, of course, as it's something uncommon—it must be uncommon."

"What I think of doing," replied Dick,

slowly and meditatively, "will be something exceptionally uncommon ; in fact, it isn't in me, Nellie, to do anything in a common way. Have I ever made love to you in an ordinary fashion ? Didn't I blurt out all my passion within ten minutes of having you all to myself the first time ? "

" I know you were very impetuous and very unconventional," she murmured, " and very delightful. But what is it you are going to do ? "

Ralston shook his head.

" I'm not quite certain as to the exact course of my proceedings, dear," he answered, " but I am perfectly assured as to how they will result. As I have already remarked, your honoured father's remarks have awakened some impulse in me. Listen ! You may tell him from me that I will behave myself until I have done something; tell him, too, that I am about to do something big, and after that I shall venture to approach him again. In the meantime he can rest in as much peace as he can find amongst the canals and canaletti of Venice—it's a restful place for the nerves."

After his sweetheart had parted from him (at a much later hour of the morning), Ralston filled and lighted a pipe, and took his way round the corner to the Riva degli Schiavoni, where amidst a multi-coloured and diverse throng, he strolled and smoked and meditated for some time. It was an ordinance of Providence that he and Nellie Parrington should marry, and it would be better for all parties concerned if her father could be brought to give his consent to the union. Ralston knew the old millionaire sufficiently to feel sure that his acquiescence in the young people's ideas might be secured if he were dealt with in the right way—the difficulty had been to find out what the right way was. Parrington had got the notion into his head that the very young and very handsome Englishman, who was so madly in love with his daughter, was at the best an idler—why else was he, at his age, spending his time in pleasure seeking? He further clung to the idea that all pleasure seekers are wasters, incapable of effort or initiative—he himself was a self-made man, and had never taken holidays

until he had made his pile, since which time he had taken many more than were really good for him. It was clearly necessary, if the millionaire's favour was to be won, that Ralston should prove himself a young man of grit and of resolution, and Ralston meant to raise proof to that effect as speedily as possible. It was his determination on this point that made him presently step into a gondola and instruct the gondoliers to take him to a quarter of the city wherein dwelt one Ulick Bourke, an Irishman of infinite resource, who at that time was living in Venice in order to reproduce some of its glories on canvas. Him Ralston found in dressing gown and slippers, alternately sipping his morning coffee, and adding a dab of colour to a half finished picture. A few words from the visitor made Bourke lay aside his brushes, add a flask of old cognac to the coffee-pot, light a black cigar, and put on his thinking cap. There was much mental effort expended in that room during the next two hours, but at the end of that time Bourke brought his hand down on his friend's shoulder with a mighty smack.

“ We’ll do it, and by this and that ’tis a fine scheme an’ll cause great diversion. And so that we can think over the details a bit more I’ll slip into a Christian-like jacket and go round to lunch with ye at Florians—sure we’ll put the thing to rights there, and I’ll be dancing at ye’er weddin’ before the month’s out.”

## II.

The Hotel Britannia, wherein Mr. Hiram J. Parrington had established himself and his daughter, was once upon a time the Palazzo Zuchelli, and had many of the charms which distinguish the palatial buildings that are thick as daisies along the winding shores of the Grand Canal. It possesses one feature which was particularly welcome to Mr. Parrington—a small balcony garden, facing the church of Santa Maria della Salute, a gorgeous and imposing pile that rises on the opposite shore, and overlooks all the varied life and colour that sweeps through the great water-highway of Venice from early morning until long after the glittering stars have flashed out of the



deep blue sky of twilight. In this garden Mr. Parrington liked to sit—especially after *déjeuner*—smoking large cigars, tasting whatever drinks suited his fancy, and gazing at the panorama unfolded before him. He became greatly interested in the gondolieri and their curious method of propelling their sable craft, in their quaint cries, in the marvellous agility which enabled them to avoid frequent immersion, and in their picturesque attitudes. Not so fond, however, was he of making excursions by the gondolier's aid. On his first arrival in Venice he had inspected the principal sights at once, and then having discovered the comfortable balcony garden, he had announced his intention of taking his ease. Several months of travel now predisposed him to luxury of this sort, and for some days he enjoyed the sensation of having nothing to do but rise when he liked, eat what he pleased, and being able to sit out in the sun filling himself full of laziness and warmth and semi-oriental do-nothingness. His daughter in the meantime explored Venice to her heart's desire, usually in the



company of Mr. Richard Ralston. Mr. Parrington, if he understood this, never mentioned it ; his one desire, as he had told her on the last occasion on which they had discussed the love affair, was for peace, and peace he meant to have.

The millionaire was naturally much alone in the little balcony garden, for though it had charm enough for sentimental young people what time Chinese lanterns were lighted at the prows of gondolas, and mandolines and guitars tinkled under the starlight, there were other things to see in Venice, and most of the folk staying at the Britannia spent the day in seeing them. But loneliness, amidst such surroundings, is welcome to a man who has lately had too much globe trotting, and Mr. Parrington never felt it. He could doze when he pleased, and smoke when he desired ; there was the open door of the reading-room just behind the little arbour in which he usually seated himself, and an attentive waiter to hand to fetch whatever literature Mr. Parrington desired to inspect. The little balcony garden of the Britannia was

his hermitage and satisfied him—he played his peaceful game there while Miss Parrington dived into ancient churches, dedicated to Santos of strange names—Moisè, Zobengo, Pantaleone, and the like—and into old palazzi and dusty shops where they sold antiques—or made romantic journeys, half hidden beneath the felze of a gondola, with Mr. Ralston. But in spite of his love of peace, Mr. Parrington was not offended when on waking up from an after dèjeuner siesta one afternoon, he found another gentleman sharing the little arbour with him. He unclasped his hands from before his stomach, pushed back his Panama hat, adjusted his spectacles, and feeling at peace with all the world, remarked that it was a fine day.

“ A fine day it is, indeed, sir ! ” responded the other with fervour. “ And a fine scene that we’re beholding, thank God ! There is no scene in all the wor-ruld, sir, that can equal this.”

“ I guess you are right there, mister,” replied the millionaire. “ It’s an uncommonly peaceful scene. I read in my guide

book as I came along the railway from Florence to this place that Venice is soothing to the nerves, and I reckon I'm on to that soothing business. The absence of street cars and of horses, sir, is a distinct advantage in this city. Those gondolas are very peaceful indeed; I find them conducive to sleep, sir, which is a hard thing to induce in our American cities."

The other man drew his chair a little nearer.

"You're from that great country, sir?" he said with an air of great interest and a tone of tender respect. "It's a country, sir, for which all of my own persecuted nation have a high regard. I'm an Irishman myself, sir. Allow me to present you with me kyard; it's an honour to meet an American citizen."

Mr. Parrington, as he took the stranger's card, looked at him more closely and recognised him as the handsome man who had attracted his daughter's attention at the table d'hôte on the previous evening. The name on the card was Terence O'Grady, M.P., and the address was Donnybrook, Dublin.

“ I am proud to make your acquaintance, Mr. O’Grady,” said the millionaire. “ Allow me, sir,” and he presented his own card to the Irishman. Mr. O’Grady received it with a bow, and uttered an exclamation which betokened exceeding joy.

“ Not the great Mr. Parrington, of Milwaukee ? ” he said. “ Ah ! I see it is. Me dear sir, allow me to shake your hand once more. Faith, ’tis a strange wurruld this ; who’d have thought, now, of seeing you in Venice at this particular minute ? ”

“ Why not ? ” asked Mr. Parrington.

“ Faith, ye may ask why not,” answered Mr. O’Grady, with a wink. “ Ye didn’t hear of a little deal there was going on here, I’m wondering ? ”

The millionaire pricked his ears.

“ I cannot say that the news of it has reached me,” he said.

“ Well, well, ’tis likely not,” said Mr. O’Grady. “ Indeed, thin, I was just wondering if the scheme had leaked out in any way—sure, ’tis in the hands of but a few, yet ye never know what may not happen ; and hearing ye speak of gondolas, ye know,

made me think ye might be interested, Mr. Parrington, as a man of high standing in the financial wurruld."

Mr. Parrington stared at his new friend. Something prompted him to beckon the waiter, who, from happy experience, always lingered near him, and to invite Mr. O'Grady to take a drink. They lighted cigars and they drank beautiful wine of Cyprus, and they talked, and Mr. O'Grady, who, as a citizen of the world, knew that you can always give your whole confidence to an American millionaire, told Mr. Parrington a secret.

There was a great scheme toward respecting Venice and the gondolas—nothing less than running the latter by electric motor power. The gondolier would be retained for his picturesqueness ; the gondola would not be changed in shape ; but it would be propelled by electricity, travel ten times as quickly, and be brought up-to-date. Its ancient charm would not be destroyed in any way ; nay, it would be enhanced, for at night a myriad electric sparks would flash about the canals and canaletti

—"as if twas heaven's own jools had come out of the skoy, sir"—Venice, the beautiful, would be more beautiful than ever.

Mr. Parrington was impressed. He had the true American love of bringing things up-to-date and he thought this was a promising scheme, and said so.

"And who is in with you, Mr. O'Grady?" he inquired.

Mr. O'Grady looked around him with cautious glances.

"There's six of us at present," he said. "The Duke of Normansland is one—sure, he's the head of one of the greatest and proudest families in England; and Lord Rothschild is another; and Sir Thomas Lipton, him as tried to lift the Cup; and Herr von Guggenheimer, the big Berlin banker; and Monsieur Bernard, the great financial agent at Paris; and within a few days we shall have Andrew Carnegie and Pierrepont Morgan—and that's a good board, Mr. Parrington."

Mr. Parrington fully agreed on that point.



“ More be token,” said Mr. O’Grady, “ the Duke of Normansland and Herr von Guggenheimer are in Venice now, prospecting with me, and the rest will be here in a few days, and then we’ll clinch matters.”

“ Mr. O’Grady,” said the millionaire, “ I would like to be with you in this. Is it to be done, sir ? ”

Mr. O’Grady was not quite sure about that. He would like Mr. Parrington’s name—indeed, he had wondered when he first heard it, if Pierrepont Morgan or Andrew Carnegie had mentioned the matter to him, and if he had come to Venice to spy out the land.

“ But I’ll tell you what, sir,” said he. “ With your very kind permission I’ll bring the Duke and Herr von Guggenheimer to see you ; they’ll be delighted to discuss the matter with one of your standing in the financial world.”

“ Mr. O’Grady,” said Mr. Parrington, solemnly, “ I shall take it as a favour if the Duke of Normansland and Herr von Guggenheimer and yourself will dine with me and



my daughter at this hotel. It couldn't be this evening, I suppose ? ”

Mr. O'Grady considered matters, and finally decided that it could. He departed to arrange matters with his friends, while Mr. Parrington sought out the manager and told him that a real British Duke was coming to dine, and gave instructions that a magnificent banquet was to be served in a private room, and that expense was as naught. Then he went back to the balcony garden and wondered if a young Englishman whom he saw there would be offended if he offered him a roll of Italian bank notes to tell him the exact method of addressing a Duke. On second considerations he decided to have a word apart with Mr. O'Grady on that matter, and he resumed his favourite occupation of watching the gondolas. In imagination he saw them propelled by electricity, and himself one of a board of directors who, with the characteristic perspicacity of the young and vigorous 20th century, had wrought a mighty change in this ancient city without destroying its picturesqueness and distinctive charm.

After this he put his handkerchief over his head and went to sleep until his daughter arrived and dragged him away to afternoon tea on the shady side of the Piazza di San Marco.

### III.

When Ralston met his sweetheart next day she was in a state of perplexed amusement.

"The poppa had a most curious dinner party last night," she said. "Nothing was said before me, and I left them as soon as I could, but I guess there's a money deal in it. There was a Duke, who was about as lively a man as ever I met, and a fat German whose evening clothes were somewhat small for him, and an Irishman who made love to——"

"Not to you!" shouted Ralston.

"Why, of course! I was the only woman present. He was a very handsome man, too, and had a way with him, and——"

"I'll break every bone in his body and punch his head!" said Dick.

"You'll have to find him first, dear," said

Miss Parrington. "However, it never came to any more than making eyes and looking unutterable sweetness at me. I think they had a good time, because I looked out of my window upon the canal when they were departing, and the good-byes would have moved an elephant to tears, or laughter. The noble Duke wanted to embrace the gondolier, and would sing a strange song about 'Hi-tiddley-hi-ti-hi-ti-hi!' and Herr von Guggenheimer apostrophised the moon, and the Irishman, Mr. O'Grady—he had the loveliest eyes, Dick—chanted 'Love's Young Dream' as the gondola glided away."

"And your respected poppa?" asked Ralston.

"Oh, he stood on the top of the steps and blessed them with a ten inch cigar!" said Miss Parrington. "Guess he's a headache this morning," she added, reflectively.

Headache or no headache, the millionaire was quite himself by five o'clock in the afternoon, when Mr. O'Grady called on him again. The Irishman beamed upon Mr. Parrington with delight.

“ Me dear friend ! ” he exclaimed. “ I congratulate ye. ‘Tis all settled—ye’re one of us. Lord Rothschild and Monsieur Bernard have arrived, and they’re agreeable to welcome ye with open arms. ‘The name of Parrington,’ says his lordship, ‘is a guarantee in itself,’ he says. ‘A most worthy gentleman,’ he says. ‘I’ll be pleased,’ he says, ‘to stick me legs under the same table with him.’ And I’ve arranged that the whole of us directhors shall meet to-night, so I’ll call for ye at eight o’clock and conduct ye to the place appointed.”

Mr. Parrington was charmed, and pressed Mr. O’Grady to dine with him once more. But Mr. O’Grady had another engagement and excused himself. He went away, and at eight o’clock returned in a gondola, into which Mr. Parrington was assisted by the hall porter. He and Mr. O’Grady lighted cigars—the latter gave his directions, and the gondolier shot his boat across the Grand Canal in the direction of Punta della Salute. Mr. Parrington wondered where they were going—he had rather a dread of

travelling over those dark, silent, star-lit waters, and a gondola always seemed a fragile sort of craft to him when he was actually in it, though graceful enough when viewed from terra-firma. He hoped they were only just going round the opposite point, but discovered that their voyage was to be a longer one ; and it was not until they had crossed the Canal della Giudecca that they came to land on a quay near the Church of Il Redentore. This was a part of Venice which Mr. Parrington did not know, and he looked about him with speculative eyes. Mr. O'Grady took his arm.

“ Follow me, me dear sir,” he said. “ I know every inch of the way hereabouts—we'll be there in no time.”

He drew the millionaire along a narrow calle until they came to a door, at which he knocked in a peculiar fashion. Mr. Parrington heard the noise of many bolts and chains within, then the door opened and Mr. O'Grady drew him inside a dark passage. A sense of something unpleasant filled his soul—the embryo board of direc-

tors appeared to be holding its first meeting in a hole-and-corner sort of fashion.

“ ’Tis a little gloomy,” said Mr. O’Grady, referring pleasantly to the pitch darkness, “ but, please God, we’ll have more light presently. There, me dear sir ! ” and he suddenly opened a door and thrust Mr. Parrington, somewhat unceremoniously, inside a room. “ There’s light—and illumination—for ye ! ” said Mr. O’Grady.

Mr. Parrington looked round and about him, and he knew that all was not well. It was a room of considerable size in which he stood, but not the sort of room in which board meetings are held. It might have been transplanted from the Quartier Latin, but it was very well where it was. There were canvases finished and canvases unfinished on the walls ; there was general litter all over the floor ; there were nine bottles on the table, and tobacco wreaths between the table and the roof. And on one side of the table sat the Duke of Normansland in a painter’s blouse, and with a damp towel round his forehead ; on the other sat Herr von Guggenheimer, spectacled



and stolid, and at the head, in a chair of magisterial appearance, sat Mr. Richard Ralston. The millionaire saw all these things quickly, and he turned to Mr. O'Grady. His look was inquiring.

"Mr. Parrington," said Ralston, "I will answer that unspoken question of yours. This is a hold-up."

" ' Hold-up, ' " said Mr. O'Grady, who had fastened the doors, and seemed to be in a cheery state of mind, " is a good word. Is there any objection to the prisoner being seated in presence of the court ? Then sit down, Mr. Parrington, me darlint, and thank heaven ye've fallen amongst gentlemen that'll treat you good."

Mr. Parrington sat down and stared at Ralston and at the others. "I do not quite gather the exact meaning of this, sir," he said, looking questioningly at the young man who aspired to his daughter's hand. "Am I kidnapped?"

"You are brought here, Mr. Parrington, in order that a few things may be pointed out to you," said Ralston. "There is no directorate of any company for electrification



of the Venetian gondola ; that was a little ruse to get you into my power. Now listen ; I wish to marry your daughter—your daughter wishes to marry me. It is your great objection to me that I have no enterprise and that I cannot carry anything out. Now this little adventure is a proof to you of what I can do ; here you are in my power, and here you will remain until you become amenable to my wishes. What do you say, Mr. Parrington ? You will find that I am adamant in will and purpose.”

“ It would appear,” said Mr. Parrington, “ that you have the whip hand of me, young man. Do I understand that unless I consent to your proposals you will detain me here as a prisoner for some indefinite period ? ”

“ Mr. Parrington, I will be frank with you. You have poured scorn upon my capabilities for doing things. I am merely endeavouring to arouse in you a great and abiding sense of admiration for my capacity to do great things. I am a stern, reason-

able man of affairs—not a man to shrink from anything. This is a desperate case, and it requires a desperate remedy. I have to inform you, Mr. Parrington, that you are absolutely defenceless and helpless. Your cell, seven feet below the level of the adjacent canal, is at this moment awaiting you, and thither you will be conducted unless you agree to my terms.”

“ I should like to know those terms,” said Mr. Parrington.

“ They are simple—that you write out your unqualified assent to the marriage of Miss Parrington and myself at once. These three gentlemen are all well known and highly respected temporary inhabitants of Venice ; they will witness your signature. What do you say ? ”

“ I guess,” replied Mr. Parrington, “ that I do not calculate to spend the rest of my life in no dungeon seven feet below the level of any canal ; and I have formed the opinion, Mr. Ralston, that you are the sort of young man who will keep his word. You have fair bested me on this deal. I

know when I'm beaten, and I'll sign that agreement and abide by it."

Mr. O'Grady burst into cheers expressive of wild joy. He was restrained until the formal agreement was drawn up, signed, and witnessed ; but as soon as that was done and the document safely bestowed in Ralston's pocket, he insisted on embracing Mr. Parrington, on introducing himself by his real name, and the Duke of Normansland and Herr von Guggenheimer by theirs, and he brought about joy and jollity in two minutes.

" Ah, sure now, we'll have a night of it ! " he said. " Mr. Parrington, sir, did ye ever taste a drop of the real potheen ; sure I've a little keg of it that I keep for great days ; we'll have it out and drink success to the Electric Gondola Company, Limited ; and by this and that," added the *ci-devant* O'Grady, " I wouldn't wonder if there isn't big money to be made out of that scheme, and I'm willing to go into it with ye, Mr. Parrington, sir, whenever ye like. But the Duke's projuced the potheen and

the necessities, and we'll drink to the bride and bridegroom that's soon to be—ah! 'tis Dick here that has the real luck, so he has!"

Mr. Parrington began to enjoy himself; within half an hour he had declared his conviction that his future son-in-law had real grit and he had always known it. He had got him, Hiram J. Parrington, in a tight place, and he was the first man who ever had, and he respected him for it.

Ralston slipped away after arranging a subsequent event with his future father-in-law. He went across to the Hotel Britannia, and asking for Miss Parrington, led her into the little balcony garden. There was an obliging moon in the wonderful sky, and the domes and spires made fairyland of Venice.

"Your father," said Ralston, very softly, "has given his unqualified consent to our union. He has changed his mind concerning me. I have no more fervent admirer, unless it is his daughter."

"But where," she asked, pressing his hand, "where is poppa?"

“ He is at a board meeting,” answered Ralston. “ He is quite happy. Are you ?”

There was no one else in the balcony garden, so she replied in the usual satisfactory way.

THE END



# **CAPTAIN LECOTTE**

**AN INCIDENT OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR**





## CAPTAIN LECOTTE

AN INCIDENT OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR

SCENE : *The interior of a cottage in Alsace.*

TIME : *Early morning, spring. The cottage is meanly furnished ; the walls are stained and discoloured ; at the back is a fireplace : on the left a couch : on the right a rough table and one or two chairs : in the centre of the stage is a barrel on end and two stools near it. There is a window between the fireplace and the left wing, and only one door at the back, which is approached from the interior by three steps. When the curtain rises, CAPTAIN LECOTTE is seen fast asleep*

*on the couch, which is covered with rugs and blankets. SERGEANT FRITZ, whose musket leans against the barrel, is standing near him, looking down on the sleeping man with an air of sad and wondering attention.*

FRITZ: Strange that a man who will so soon sleep his last sleep can sleep as he is sleeping! He lay down there last night and went to sleep like a child on its mother's breast. Now, if I had known that I was going to be shot at daybreak, shot as a traitor to France, why, I don't think I could have closed an eye! A traitor to France! My God! I can't believe that Philip Lecotte could *ever* be that. He was always a good soldier—always true to the cause—always hard working and devoted. It's too much to ask *me* to believe that he could betray France to those rascally Germans. There's some mystery about all this, and there he sleeps, keeping silence until it's too late. Ah, Philip, my boy, if only you'd made

poor old Fritz your confidant. They granted him as a last favour that I, his old schoolmate, should have him in custody for his last few hours on earth. Why didn't he talk to me last night, instead of going to sleep in that way? A lot of sleep I've had—I've never winked an eye since midnight. And now, why it's past five already, and he's to die at six. He shan't die until I've talked with him. I shall never rest again in this world unless I know what all this means. I shall wake him. [*He walks up to the couch and begins to shake LECOTTE by the shoulder.*] Here, Captain! Captain Lecotte, Wake up! Wake up! I say! Captain, wake up!

LECOTTE : [*Waking slowly and speaking in a dull, grumbling fashion.*] Eh!

FRITZ : Wake up, Captain; it's morning.

LECOTTE : [*Still half asleep.*] Morning?

FRITZ : Yes, morning, Captain—the morning.

LECOTTE : Oh ! [*Yawns and stretches himself.*] Oh, *the* morning, is it ?  
What time is it ?

FRITZ : Five o'clock, Captain.

LECOTTE : Five o'clock, eh ? And [*yawns mightily*], and what time is the little affair to take place ?

FRITZ : At six o'clock, Captain.

LECOTTE : Six o'clock ! One whole hour to spare yet, eh ?

FRITZ : Yes, Captain ; a whole hour.

LECOTTE : Then why the devil don't you go to sleep ? [*Turns round, settles himself, and prepares to sleep again.*  
FRITZ, *however, persists in waking him up.*]

FRITZ : Come, come, Captain, wake up. I want to talk to you—I, Fritz, your old friend. You wouldn't say a word to poor old Fritz last night, and there were so many things that I wanted you to say.

LECOTTE : [*Sleepily.*] Least said, soonest mended. Don't be so damned sentimental !

FRITZ : But, Captain—Captain—you've scarce an hour to live. It's well past five now, and the firing party will be outside there at six sharp.

LECOTTE : Very pleased to see 'em.

FRITZ : [*With sternness.*] Captain, this won't do. That cynical demeanour of yours isn't worthy of my old school-mate. Come, Philip, wake up. I tell you again I want to talk to you. You're about to die, but I swear that before you go out of that door to your death you *shall* have a last word or two with me. There's some mystery about this affair of yours that I must get to the bottom of. I shall never know happiness again if you die without giving me your confidence.

LECOTTE : [*Gradually rising, yawning, and stretching himself.*] Confidence, eh? Ah, well, I've nothing else that I could give you, Fritz, old friend. Confidence? That's a nice legacy to leave, isn't it? Worth all the millions that ever were millioned. Half-an-hour's

confidence instead of a pretty widow, a little place in the country, and a fortune of ten thousand francs a year. Very good, very good, very good! [*Yawns tremendously, stretches himself as he gets to his feet, and looks down at his boots.*] Oh, I never remember going to bed in my spurs before. [*Sits down again and takes off his spurs, FRITZ standing by and watching him wonderingly.*] There. [*Throwing the spurs away.*] Nobody'll ever have to brighten you up again—for me, at any rate. I say, Fritz, where's the shooting to take place?

FRITZ : [*Regarding him sadly.*] Just outside, Captain. In the courtyard in fact.

LECOTTE : Is it—just a step, eh? A step from this to that?

FRITZ : [*Reprovingly.*] Captain, is it right for a man to approach the unknown in such a light spirit?

LECOTTE : Oh! oh! oh! you old croaker. Why, Fritz, man, haven't men like you



and me approached death a hundred times a day ?

FRITZ : Aye—in the open field ; but not as a traitor to France.

LECOTTE : [*Suddenly becoming grave.*] A —traitor—to—France ! Ah ! Ah well, never mind. Fritz, come, old comrade, what need to be sad at a time like this ? How long did you say I had to live—an hour ? A whole hour of glorious life ! Why, what haven't I done in an hour in my time ? Seen a pretty girl, made love to her, won her, and grown tired of her—all within an hour ! staked a fortune—lost it—won it back again—and lost it again, and all within an hour ! An hour, why, Fritz, my boy, an hour's a life-time. You can do all sorts of things in an hour !

FRITZ : Yes, Captain, and there are some things that one *ought* to do in one's last hour. Captain, wouldn't you like to see a priest and a lawyer, and—and are there no friends ?

LECOTTE : A priest—bah ! A lawyer ! Why, man, I've nothing to leave and

no money to apologise to him with for looking into his parchment face and hearing his raven voice. And as for friends—oh, Fritz, I shall find those whistling bullets far better friends than any men—or women—I ever knew in this world.

FRITZ : There's one man, Captain, who's your friend, and here he stands. Captain, you're not yourself ; it's not like you to talk in this careless, cynical fashion about what's coming. I've faced death a thousand times and seen other men face it, but no brave man ever went to death yet without that sense of fear and reverence which all brave men have for it. There's some mystery about all this, Captain. *You* know there is, and it's your duty to tell me, your old friend, what it is. Look the thing straight in the face—there are you, Philip Lecotte, the lad I've known since you were that high, with a good record in the Army, marked out for preferment, sure to rise to a great place, and you're to die a shameful

death within the hour for what—treachery ! Treachery to France ! I *can't* believe it. I *won't* believe it ; and I beg you to tell me before you die what it all means—what the mystery is. Captain, you'll speak ?

LECOTTE : [*Who during this speech has gradually thrown off his cynical demeanour.*] Ah, Fritz, old friend, there are some mysteries, some secrets that one had far better entrust to the quietude of the grave than trust to man. If—if I—a dying man—tell you—all that I might tell you—will you give me your word of honour that no soul on earth shall ever learn my secret from you ?

FRITZ : The word of a soldier of France !

LECOTTE : Then listen. [*He sits down on one side of the table ; FRITZ sits down on the other.*] Fritz, you and I were boys together ; we never had a care in those days, eh ? All the world lay before us ; we carried the marshal's baton in our knapsacks ; we were to be second Napoleons, weren't we, and we were

to know everything of glory, and happiness, and—did we ever talk of *love* in those days, Fritz ?

FRITZ : Aye, as lads will, Captain.

LECOTTE : Aye, as lads will. Ah, that love ! How different love is when lads talk of it to what it is when a man *feels* it. Fritz, do you remember when you were sent off to Algiers with your regiment, and I was left on regimental duty in Paris ?

FRITZ : I remember.

LECOTTE : [*Dreamily.*] It seems a long, long time ago. Strange, how curiously time shapes itself—this hour seems very long, too. Well, there came a day, Fritz, after you had gone when I was walking along the boulevards, thinking of naught in particular, and I suddenly saw a girl's face in the crowd—a girl with such soft, warm eyes, and a face crowned with such bright sunny hair [*with a great sigh*]. That was Fifi.

FRITZ : Fifi ?

LECOTTE : [*Expressively.*] Aye, Fifi.

FRITZ : [*Excitedly.*] Captain ! I see it !  
I see it ! There's a woman at the  
bottom of this infernal mess.

LECOTTE : [*Laughing dismally.*] I wonder if there ever was an infernal mess that hadn't a woman at the bottom of it ? But come, Fritz, no more cheap philosophy. That was Fifi, the sweetest thing, I think, that God ever made—but a woman.

FRITZ : And you fell in love with her, Captain ?

LECOTTE : *Fell* in love ? Tumbled in love—rolled in love—revelled in love. Why, man, I *worshipped* her little hands—I'd have given all France for her dear little finger nails !

FRITZ : Ah, some men *are* fools ! And she, Captain, she loved you ?

LECOTTE : I thought so ; I *thought* so.

FRITZ : Captain, what happened ?

LECOTTE : Happened ? Oh, lots of things. It's a most curious thing, Fritz, what a lot of things *do* happen

when a man falls in love with a woman. We met—and we—then we met again—and again—and we——

FRITZ : Went on meeting, eh, Captain ?

LECOTTE : Ye—es, we went on meeting ; and at last, Fritz, I asked her to marry me.

FRITZ : *Mon Dieu !* You were brave, Captain. Why, I—I never dared to ask a woman to marry *me !*

LECOTTE : Ah, you were born under a lucky star. Well, Fifi and I were married.

FRITZ : Then—this Fifi is your wife ?

LECOTTE : Fifi—is—my—wife.

FRITZ : But you said you had no friends.

LECOTTE : Um—a man may have a wife and yet be without a friend, mayn't he ?

FRITZ : Captain, what happened ? It seems to me, a rough, old, weather-beaten soldier, that when a man marries everything ought to be paradise.

LECOTTE : Aye, which paradise ? The paradise of simple, trusting hearts, or the paradise of fools ? Why, man, it was paradise to me—Fifi was all, and all in all ; her smile was heaven, her voice music, her presence like the sun on a spring day, and I, poor fool, thought that I was all to her that she was to me. I wonder what the devil it is that makes men so blind to what women really are ?

FRITZ : It's what they call love, Captain. But Fifi ?—Madame Lecotte ? She—

LECOTTE : Ah, Fritz, it's an easy thing, *sometimes*, to win a girl's love ; but it's not an easy thing to keep it ! She—left me, Fritz. Do you know what it means to see the dearest thing you ever knew, lie dead ?

FRITZ : I saw my sister in her coffin. She was a young girl, and her face was like Our Lady's in the pictures above the altar. She and I loved as the angels love.

LECOTTE : God rest her sweet soul ! She is happy. If I could have seen my



Fifi dead and cold I would have thanked God and prayed Him to keep me pure and strong until He let me go to her. Death ! why that's peace and rest ; but....dishonour....

FRITZ : Dishonour, Captain ? She....ah, there was another man ?

LECOTTE : Isn't there always another man ? Aye, Fritz, there was just one year of the fool's paradise, and then she was gone ; and all that was left to me was a heart full of memories—memories—and regrets ! A lot of good *they* are ! and a letter from her in which she told me that it was a great mistake for a girl to marry a man old enough to be her father, and that she had found the man she really loved, and was oh, so happy with *him*. These women know how to write that sort of letter, don't they ?

FRITZ : And that's the end, Captain ?

LECOTTE : Well, really, I think *that's* [*pointing to the door*]*—I think that's* going to be the end. Fritz, you know

me. When a man like me loves, he loves once and for all. It matters nothing to him what the woman does, she may change, she may leave him, she may forget him. *He* never forgets and *never* changes. After Fifi left me for the other man, I heard nothing of them until yesterday. *Then* I discovered that they were here ; I discovered, too, that he, a Frenchman, was in the pay of the German Government, that he was a spy, in momentary danger of arrest and immediate execution. They have children, Fritz—Fifi's children—and they love each other. Yes—yes—yes—Fifi *loves him*. And so—and so—for Fifi's sake—and for the sake of Fifi's children——

FRITZ : Captain, I see it ! I see it ! You—you—you are going to sacrifice *your* life for the sake of the woman who betrayed you—*your* life !

LECOTTE : Well, you don't suppose that I've got so much satisfaction out of my life that I'm particularly anxious to pre-

serve it, do you ? Don't be so damned sentimental ! What's the good of my life to me since *she* went out of it ? You see, Fritz, she *loves* him. Oh, *I've* found all about them since yesterday. And there are the little children—Fifi's children. Fritz, *we* never had a child. I have thought, sometimes—that if—if——

FRITZ : Captain ! Captain !

LECOTTE : That if there had been a child all this might have been *so* different ! And then they're poor ; dear little Fifi, that never knew what it was to want *luxuries* when she was mine, has had to work, Fritz—to *work*. A woman *must* love a man when she'll do that ! It was because they were poor that the man was tempted, and fell, and did this—this treachery to France !

FRITZ : For which *you're* to die, Captain !

LECOTTE : 'Sh ! What's that matter ? There ! [*Rises and throws off his emotion with a gesture.*] Come, Fritz, I've told you everything now, and—why

there's half an hour to live yet ! Come, let's have a last drink together, and a last cigarette, and, why, there are *cards*, and I've a few francs still left somewhere—a last game of piquet. Oh, it will be like the gay old days when we were lads, and the world was a football which we were going to kick as it pleased us. Come on, Fritz—— old comrade ; come on ! [*He fills up glasses from a bottle on the table, lights a cigarette, and pledges FRITZ with a gesture.*]

FRITZ : Oh, Captain, Captain, I wonder which you are—a fool or a hero ?

LECOTTE : I'm damned if *I* know ! I never was good at riddles, especially at five o'clock in the morning. Come, man, drink—drink, and light your cigarette, and here, cut the cards." [*FRITZ, with deprecation written all over him, obeys. LECOTTE watches him calmly.*]

FRITZ : [*Bowing.*] Your health, Captain.

LECOTTE : Your health, Sergeant.

*[They sit down on the stools at the barrel, and begin playing cards. Daylight breaks through the window.]*

FRITZ : A fine morning, Captain. My trick, I think.

LECOTTE : Beautiful morning, Sergeant. I deal. It was just such a morning as this when we were engaged in the affair at ——, wasn't it ? Things have gone badly with us since then—badly for poor France.

FRITZ : *[Suddenly throwing down his cards.]* I tell you I *won't* play ! I'm damned if I will. The mere idea of a man who's just going to be shot playing cards ! Captain, for Heaven's sake be a bit more of a human being—be a man, and don't torment me with that devilish carelessness of yours !

LECOTTE : Sergeant, did you ever find me a coward ?

FRITZ : Never !

LECOTTE : Then don't tempt me to be one. *[Sternly]* Sit down, pick up your cards. Your deal, Sergeant. Fritz.

*[A sudden knock comes at the door. FRITZ starts and LECOTTE, holding his cards, stares across.]*

FRITZ : A knock ! It's not yet six. What can it be ?

LECOTTE : Why the devil don't you open the door and find out ?

FRITZ : Captain, if it should be—if it should be—see, it's daybreak already—if it should be the firing party ?

LECOTTE : Oh, show them in. Show them in.

FRITZ : Ah ! *[Sighs profoundly, goes across to door, pauses, looking at LECOTTE, who continues to gaze at and re-arrange his cards. The knock is repeated. FRITZ undoes the bolts, throws open the door, and reveals FIFI, who throws back the hood of her cloak as she enters. At the instant she is revealed, LECOTTE turns and recognises her. FRITZ, still holding the door, stands staring from one to the other.]*

LECOTTE : *[Rising.]* Fifi !

FIFI : *[Coming down the steps.]* Philip !



LECOTTE : [*After a pause, during which he and she look at each other in silence, FRITZ after staring at them, shakes his head, goes quietly out and closes the door behind him.*] Why are you here ?

FIFI : Because I know everything !

LECOTTE : [*Laughs.*] Ah, trust a woman to get to the bottom of whatever's going on. Well ?

FIFI : [*Who has only advanced a step or two into the room, and gazes at him half-frightened and with eyes full of wonder.*] Philip, you are sacrificing your life for—*my* sake.

LECOTTE : Well ?

FIFI : Your *life*—*your* life—for *me*—a man's life, for the sake of a faithless woman !

LECOTTE : Well, I don't know that there's anything very wonderful about *that*, quite an everyday occurrence, *I* should say, considering what men are—or what *women* make them. Oh, Fifi, why did you come here ? It had been kinder to let this thing pass and leave



me to face it alone. I was careless until I saw *you* standing there, and now—*now—why* did you come here?

FIFI : [*Coming nearer to him.*] Philip, it was not until an hour ago that I found out what it was that you were doing. *He* is gone—safe—*safe*. Oh, you *will* forgive him? We were so poor, and everything was so hard; and there were the children. And he was so sorely tempted; and, Oh, how *can* I say these things when you are standing there waiting for death—and death for *my* sake? Oh! it must not be! It *shall* not be!

LECOTTE : [*Who has watched her curiously and now comes to her and takes her hand.*] Fifi, it will be, and it will be very soon now. See, there is the sunrise—the last sunrise that I shall ever look on. You will be brave, will you not? You will not do anything to break down this strength of mine? Why, what is it that I do? Do you think that life has ever had any charms for me since

you left me ? Ah, Fifi, do you know, perhaps a dying man may say what another man should not say—do you know that I love you still ?

FIFI : Oh, yes, yes, yes ! I have known it always—always. And now—

LECOTTE : And now ?

FIFI : [*Weeping.*] Now I know it as I never knew it. And oh, Philip, I—I—when I found all this out—when I knew what you were doing—for me and him—then I found too, that I—that I—oh, it is *you* I love—you—you, my husband !

LECOTTE : Sh—sh ! Fifi, not that. Not *that*, Fifi—come — come — *remember*, there are *others* to think of—your *children*, eh, Fifi ? Tell me, are they like you ? Is there one that *will* be like you some day ?

FIFI : Philip ! I cannot talk of them. Oh ! [*screams*] don't you know that—that it is daybreak and that—that you are so near to death ? Philip, it *must*

not be ; let me go to the General ; let me tell him everything !

LECOTTE : [*Leading her over to the couch and making her sit down, while he himself kneels beside her.*] Hush, Fifì, hush ! You said just now, Fifì, that after all it is I you love, is that true ?

FIFÌ : It is true ! It is true ! Oh, God ! I never knew it until now—and now it is too late !

LECOTTE : No, it is not too late, for now I know ! Ah, Fifì, if love were all—then one might be selfish ; but there are greater things than love. Fifì, you will promise me that you will be true to this man whose life you have linked with yours. You will remember that he is what I never was to you ; you will love your little ones and teach them to be good men and women. You will let me carry away with me a last thought of you, a good woman, resolved to do and be everything that I would have you to be.

FIFI : Oh, I promise, I promise. But, your *life*—your *dear* life—to think that *I* have wrecked it. Oh, Philip, how *shall* I go through the rest of mine, remembering all this—remembering that a woman's weakness has ruined a brave man's life—sent him to a death like—my God !—a death like that !

LECOTTE : Hush ! hush !

FIFI : Oh, I must speak. My heart is breaking. You *shall* not die like that. I love you ! I love you ! If you die I shall die too—I shall die too !

LECOTTE : [*Soothing her.*] No, no, Fifi, you will *live*. Love is not all—it is only a part of life. If you love me you will be brave now ; you will help me to go through this last moment, and then—then you will go back to those who love you, and you will do all that I have asked of you, for my sake. Fifi, now that I am so near to the end of it, I begin to see what life means. Not love, but duty is the secret. There are moments in this sad life of ours

when even the lowest of us must needs rise out of our poor selves to far better and greater things, but such moments only come when one throws aside all thoughts of self, and loses self and life for the things one loves. This poor life of mine, so worthless and empty since your dear love went out of it, is but a slight thing to give. Let it be my last thought, Fifi, that in that strange, mysterious world which I shall see so very soon, I may wait for you, and you will come to me, the sweet pure child you were when first I knew you ; and then your love, made new and fresh again, will comfort me for *all* that I have done, and God will let us forget all this pain and sorrow, and give us peace, and rest, and love. And now, farewell ! Farewell !

*[He breaks down and takes her in his arms for the first time since she has entered the cottage. For a moment she remains there, her head on his shoulder. She is sobbing. He, bending over her, tries to soothe her. A knock comes at the*

*door, and as FRITZ throws it open from outside, the sound of soldiers grounding their rifles in the courtyard is heard, and the voice of an officer giving words of command.]*

FRITZ : Captain, the time has come.

FIFI : [*Tears herself away from LECOTTE'S arms and springs between him and the door.*] No ! no ! You shall not die ! You shall not die ! Oh, God ! Philip ! Philip !

*[As she speaks LECOTTE makes signs to FRITZ, who approaches FIFI from behind, and seizes and takes her into his arms where she suddenly faints, and FRITZ lays her on the couch. The officer's voice from outside is heard calling.]*

OFFICER : [*Appearing on threshold.*] Philip Lecotte !

LECOTTE : [*Advancing to table and waving his glass to the Captain.*] At your service, Monsieur Captain ; at your service ! [*He pauses a moment, looks at FIFI as she lies on the couch with FRITZ standing at her side, then walks to the door. At the*

*top of the steps he pauses, looks round again, comes back, goes to the couch and kisses her forehead, then goes up to FRITZ, and still watching FIFI, shakes FRITZ by both hands, and turning to him, looks him in the face, gives him a last hand shake, and a pat on the shoulder, all in silence ; then marches straight to the door. As he reaches the top step he turns, gives one last look at FIFI, then goes out. The officer's voice is heard again.]*

OFFICER : Attention !      Make      ready !  
Present !

LECOTTE'S VOICE : Vive la France !

*[His cry is immediately followed by the rattle of the rifles, and the curtain comes down on FIFI lying unconscious on the couch and on FRITZ kneeling with bent head and clasped hands at her side.]*

THE END





**THE LADY SPEAKS**



## THE LADY SPEAKS.

PARSON JOYCE had been ill throughout the greater part of the hard winter, and when he went abroad again for the first time, there were many signs in the garden of his vicarage that winter was already changing to spring. These signs were apparent to the most indifferent that early February morning; to the man lately risen from a sick bed they came with an overwhelming sense of joy and gratitude.

Moving slowly about the gravelled walks in his thickest cassock and warmest cloak—both grown to a somewhat rusty black by reason of much wearing, and one at least tattered at the hem by constant fretting against its wearer's heels—Parson Joyce felt the last frosts of the winter bring a warmer glow to his cheeks, and a livelier motion to the blood, which of

late had run but sluggishly through his veins. And being a devout man, though yet but thirty years of age, he lifted his shovel hat as he looked about him and thanked God that he was still alive, and in likelihood to be so for many a year to come.

Folk of the worldling class would have said that Parson Joyce must be easily content with his lot—there seemed to be so little in it to their eyes for which one could be thankful. He had his vicarage and a little glebe ; sixty pounds a year in money, and a little more from his dues ; 'twas enough to exist on, but only that, and in such an out-of-the-way parish what chance had he of promotion ? It had never occurred to him, however, that he was aught but a fortunate man—his tastes were few and very simple, and easily supplied by the old woman who served him.

He was one of those men who never look twice at whatever meat is set before them, and cannot tell you the difference 'twixt beef and mutton. He had the bad habit of reading while he ate, and he was a trying man

to the housekeeper in respect of the fact that he never could remember the exact hour for dinner. And very often instead of eating his dinner when it was set before him he would wait until the old woman had left the room, and would then bolt through the window with a heaped-up dish to some old gaffer or gammer whose wants—in his opinion—were greater than his own.

As he wandered around his garden, pottering about him with his stick, Parson Joyce heard the click of the gate and looked in its direction. There, framed by the evergreen arch which showed dark against the faintly frosted silver of the meadows beyond, stood as dainty a piece of womanhood as a man might wish to see—Mistress Sybil Luttrell, Lady of the Manor, rich, beautiful, scarce out of her teens, an imperious young woman who ruled the countryside, and was ardently desired by every young gentleman and a good many old ones, of the neighbourhood. Since the death of her father, old Squire Anthony, her will had been law, and the law had been pleasant, so long as it was obeyed. For Mistress Luttrell, girl though she was,

had a will of her own, and a temper of her own, and had yet to learn that no one in this world can have all his own way.

But there was no trace of imperious bearing in her manner as she moved with the grace of a pretty woman to where Parson Joyce stood watching her, and held out a little hand to him.

“ Mr. Joyce,” she said, “ I am glad that you are able to be about your garden again. Your strength——? ”

The parson took off his shovel hat as he bent over her hand.

“ I thank you, madam,” he answered. “ I thank Heaven, my strength is rapidly returning. I hope to go about the parish in a few days. It has been much neglected.”

He kept his hat in his hand, like a school-boy, until the lady impatiently motioned him to resume it.

“ The parish ! ” she exclaimed. “ Oh, the parish has taken care of itself, Mr. Joyce. But they will all be glad to see you again—you are so good to them.”

Parson Joyce pottered about the walk



with his stick. He was one of those men who cannot understand why their work should be praised.

“ There were many sick and poor when I was stricken,” he said presently. “ It was a sore thought——”

“ But they were all cared for—all ! ” she said with emphasis. “ Surely, you knew that I would see to that, Mr. Joyce ? ”

“ Madam,” he said, “ I have always known that you were all that is charitable and good.”

“ No, no ! ” she exclaimed. “ Don’t hold too high an opinion of me, I pray you. But ”—her voice took a lower tone—“ I try to be good. It is sometimes hard.”

She spoke the last word in little more than a whisper, and a man better acquainted with her than Parson Joyce was, would have seen that she was somewhat agitated. But the parson saw naught, for the sufficient reason that he was shy in the presence of women, and especially of this one woman, and rarely dared to face the artillery of her eyes.

“ Not sometimes, madam,” he said, correcting her gently. “ Always.”

“ Always, then,” she said. “ I would not contradict you. And yet, I *have* found it easy to be very good sometimes,” she added with a certain arch humour, and a sly glance at his averted face.

Parson Joyce said naught to this heretical assertion. The lady smiled and spoke again, and this time she did not look at her companion, but at the top of the elms on the further side of the garden.

“ And I know—someone,” she said, “ to whom it seems a very easy matter always to be—very, very good. But perhaps——”

Parson Joyce favoured her with a wondering look.

“ There is no one like that, madam,” he said. “ No one knows what lies in the human heart—it has its secrets.”

“ Ah ! ” she flashed out upon him. “ That’s true.” She stroked her muff with trifling touches of her slender fingers for awhile, then looking artlessly at him, she said : “ Mr. Joyce, I came here for two reasons—to give you my congratulations

and to speak to you about myself and another."

The parson felt something clutch at his heart, and he put his stick hard on the path and leaned upon it. The lady, stroking her muff, and regarding it with great interest, did not notice his sudden change of manner. She spoke again, rather hesitatingly.

"Are—are you strong enough to talk to me, Mr. Joyce?"

"I am, madam," he answered.

"But shall we not go into the vicarage?" she asked. "'Tis not good for you to remain out so long."

Parson Joyce led the way to his little study. Something told him that he was about to hear news which would change all the current of his quiet life, and as he walked he prayed for strength to bear the communication which he believed the Lady of the Manor was about to make to him as her official guide and pastor. For simple man as Parson Joyce was, he was still a man, and for two long years he had been in love with the girl who now walked behind him, so closely that she could have touched the

worn out cloak, but who, in his eyes, was as far out of his reach as any star in the heavens.

There was a bright fire of wood in the little room where the parson kept his treasured books and wrote his sermons. It was a poor enough room, but there was an air of homely comfort about it which made the Lady of the Manor sigh. She sank into the only easy chair which the room contained, and for a full moment there was silence. Then the girl looked up at the man, and if the man had looked at the girl he would have seen that her eyes were full of more than one emotion. But the man was half-turned from her, and his eyes were fastened on the sputtering pine logs.

“ Mr. Joyce,” she began, and then paused as if in doubt. “ I find it difficult to say what I want to say,” she said at last, when the silence had once more grown oppressive.

The parson spoke, and his voice sounded as cold as the old vault of the church which shut in one side of his garden.

“ I am here to listen to whatever it pleases you to tell me, madam,” he said.

“ Still it is difficult to speak of some things . . . to a man,” she murmured, and her fingers began to play with her muff once more.

“ Have you no lady friends, madam ? ” he asked, cold as ever.

“ None that I could say this particular thing to,” she answered. “ Indeed there is no one but you to whom I could say it.”

Parson Joyce made no answer. He still sat in the attitude of a confessor ; his eyes were firmly fixed on the glowing fire. And once more there was silence.

Suddenly the girl laughed—a merry, rippling laugh that sent a cold shiver all through the man’s being. His brows drew together.

“ Think ! ” said she. “ As I came along the road I knew quite well *all* that I meant to say—every word. And now it has slipped my memory, and I can only make a lame tale of it. But . . . ” she paused and stole a sly glance at him, and something in

his attitude made her lay her hand timidly on his arm. "Won't you, please, look at me?" she asked.

The parson turned in his chair and looked her full in the eyes. And thereat her own averted themselves, and when she spoke again it was she who looked away and not the man. Thenceforward to the end his eyes never left her face.

"I wanted to tell you something," she said hesitatingly. "I—has it ever struck you that I am placed in a position of great difficulty? I am very young, very rich, and—a woman. Ought not I to have someone upon whom I could depend for guidance and help and . . . protection? I mean . . . ought I not to marry?"

"It is the apparent end of the conditions, madam."

"You think that a great heiress must marry? So everybody seems to think . . . I am told of it a hundred times a week! And there are so many gentlemen who wish to marry me, Mr. Joyce; you yourself know of several, do you not?"



Which would you advise me to accept—for, indeed, they pester my life out ! ”

“ Madam,” said the parson hurriedly, “ in a matter like that—in a matter like that, I say, I cannot counsel. ‘Tis a matter for your own heart, and only your own heart.”

“ Heart? Ah !—then you would counsel me to marry for . . . love ! ”

“ It should be the basis of every marriage, madam,” answered Parson Joyce.

“ May I tell you something ? ” she whispered. “ I—I am in love ! Oh ! I never, never thought it could be . . . anything like it is. I suppose no woman ever was so much, so happily in love as I. I have been in love for half a year, and it has made me—I do not know *what* it has made me, except that I love all the world because of it—man, the trees and flowers, everything.”

“ It is true love, madam, that works these changes,” said the parson very quietly. “ You should thank Heaven for it.”

She flashed swift eyes, with a glint of tears in them, on him for a second.

“ But I do ! ” she cried. “ All day long,



and whenever I wake in the night. And yet . . . ” she paused as a veil of sadness spread itself across her face.

“ Yes, madam ? ” said the parson.

“ I do not know if my love is returned,” she whispered.

Parson Joyce drew a long breath.

“ The gentleman . . . ” he stopped, scarce knowing what to say. “ Then he has not spoken to you ? ” he added lamely.

“ Of love ? Not one word ! ” she answered. “ Sometimes I think . . . I *think* he cares for me, and sometimes I fear he does not. May I tell you about him ?—it will be such a relief, because I have no one whom I may tell . . . but you.”

The parson bowed his head. Human feeling was rapidly thawing the priest within the man ; he felt now as if he were the brother of this glowing and radiant young creature.

“ Yes,” he said ; “ tell me.”

Again she laughed merrily.

“ Now I *cannot* tell you,” she said. “ A moment ago I thought I could, and now

. . . Well, he is good, and he is most lovable, and he is . . . and I love him ! ”

“ He must be worthy indeed, madam, who is worthy of your love,” answered the parson, and he sighed.

“ Ah, but am I worthy of his ? ” she said with sudden deep feeling.

“ I do not know him,” answered Parson Joyce.

“ No,” she said. “ I do not think you do. But . . . tell me, what must I do. Indeed, indeed, there is no other man in all the world that I will marry. I will die a maid if I cannot marry the man I love ! ”

“ Will he not speak ? ”

“ He has not spoken.”

“ I have heard,” said Parson Joyce, “that there are ways by which a man in these cases may be made to speak.”

The girl shrugged her shoulders and made a little grimace.

“ I wish I knew them ! ” she said.

“ The gentleman, madam, is, perhaps, poor ? ”

“ In the eyes of the world, yes ; in mine, no.”

“ And, possibly, proud ? ”

“ With the pride of a true man.”

“ It might seem pretentious on his part to seek your hand, madam ? ”

“ I believe, upon my soul, it is some such nonsense as that which fills his head ! ” she exclaimed, tapping her toe against the fender.

“ But, madam ! ” Parson Joyce in his agitation rose and stood before her with clasped hands. “ Consider the feelings of a poor gentleman, who, may be, loves and adores you with all his heart, but who judges it presumptuous——”

“ Presumptuous ? Oh ! ” she said, “ I have no patience with such silliness. The mere fact that I love him makes him far above me. Do I not tell you that my love for him is so great that it has changed all my heart ! ”

There was silence for a while ; the parson was wondering who the man might be whose mere existence had so transformed this once imperious and coquettish young beauty. He ran them all over in his mind, and could fix on none. And, without knowing it, he sighed.

“ It seems to me, madam,” said Parson Joyce, “ that there is but one way out of the difficulty.” He faced her fair and square, in the determined way in which he always stood in his pulpit, and she looked up at him, and immediately looked elsewhere. “ If the gentleman cannot be brought to declare his love, and his love is so necessary to your happiness——”

“ Yes,” she murmured. “ It is . . . it has come to be my life.”

“ And if you feel assured that he is keeping silent because he fears to be thought presumptuous——”

“ Yes, yes—I know it is so.”

“ Then,” said Parson Joyce, “ you must tell him of your love for him.” He said the words solemnly and resignedly, knowing that she would do what he advised ; knowing full well, too, that no man would resist her, and that ere long she would be this unknown, highly favoured man’s wife, and all would be changed. And after he had spoken he began to pray somewhere far inside himself. Her voice came to him as he stood over her—a soft, very feminine voice.

“ You think that *I* should tell *him* ? ” she said.

“ It is the only way I can think of, madam,” he answered.

And then came the great surprise of Parson Joyce’s life. For the girl slid down on her knees before him and seized his hands, and laid her face against them.

“ But I have been trying to tell him for the last ten minutes,” she whispered. “ And he doesn’t see yet.”

And then Parson Joyce saw.

THE END

MR. POSKITT AT THE FUNERAL





## MR. POSKITT AT THE FUNERAL

“ I SHOULD in nowise be surprised,” said Nicodemus, the postman, as he opened out his letters on the hall table of the Blue Lion and bowed his head reverently at the pint of old ale which the landlady had set before him in pursuance of a time honoured custom. “ I should, I say, in nowise experience astonishment, ma’am, if I presently heard that owd Mestur Winterapple, of Havercroft Farm, had been called out of this vale of tears into them bright abodes of bliss wherein I trust we shall all of us eventually be found, and where we shall discourse upon harps, and other musical instruments, instead of carrying letters over dusty roads on a hot June morning.”

“ You use such long, fine words, ’Demus,” said the landlady, “ that I niver rightly

know what you're talking about. What's your meaning this time?"

"My meaning, ma'am," replied Nicodemus, setting down the tankard, "is that I think owd Mestur Winterapple is gathered to his fathers—in other words, ma'am, that he is dead."

"Gracious!" exclaimed the landlady. "Old Mr. Winterapple! And what makes you think that, 'Demus?"

"Because, ma'am," replied the postman, pointing to the letters spread out before him, "here is an envelope with an uncommonly deep sable edge around it, addressed to our friend Mestur Poskitt, and bearing the Havercroft postmark. Now, Mestur Poskitt and Mestur Winterapple are old friends and fellow pilgrims, and as Mestur Winterapple has been failing in health for some time, I take it that this black edged letter is to inform Mestur Poskitt that Mestur Winterapple is unfortunately no more."

"It seems to me," remarked the landlady, "that you can read what's inside a letter by merely looking at the envelope."

“Why, yes, ma’am,” answered Nicodemus, imperturbable as ever. “I know, for instance, that of these two epistles of yours, which I hereby hand over to you, ma’am, in the legal form, one is from the brewer’s traveller, to say he’ll call Tuesday is a week, and the other is from your good old mother at Sicaster, to thank the master kindly for that sack of potatoes he sent her by the carrier last week.”

“And how might you know all that, pray?” rejoined Mrs. Bulmer, turning the letters over.

“Because, ma’am, the brewer’s traveller always does call on the first Tuesday in the month,” answered Nicodemus, gathering up the remainder of his letters, “and you yourself told me of the potatoes a week ago, and I know your mother has not written since.”

“I wonder if old Mr. Winterapple is dead?” said Mrs. Bulmer, musingly. “It’ll be a big buryin’ if he is—he was that respected.”

“I shall soon know all about it, ma’am,” replied the postman, moving to the door.

“ Mestur Poskitt always tells me all the news of a local nature that is conveyed to him in his correspondence, and I shall not fail to report the exact truth to you, ma’am, on returning from my round.”

Nicodemus made more speed than usual through the village that morning in order that he might the sooner find out if his suspicions were correct or not, and he arrived at Mr. Poskitt’s little house at least a quarter of an hour earlier than usual, and found that worthy gentleman walking in his garden inspecting the flowers, which made a gay show in the beds and side walks. It was seldom that Nicodemus arrived before nine o’clock, at which hour Mr. Poskitt was usually found at the breakfast table—his premature appearance on this occasion made Mr. Poskitt open eyes and mouth and regard him with evident astonishment.

“ Hello ! ” he said “ What brings thee here soä early ? Thou’rt twenty minutes afore t’ usual time.”

“ The correspondence entrusted to my fatherly care this morning, Mestur Poskitt,” replied Nicodemus, opening his bag and

producing Mr. Poskitt's letters, "is not so large as is usual, sir, fraught though it may be with tidings of joy and mirth, life and death," and he presented the letters with a low bow and a deep sigh, the black edged envelope being placed in clear view on top of the others.

"What's ta say?" exclaimed Mr. Poskitt. "Deeäth? Now, then, what's this here—a black edged envelope? Eh, dear!—I'm afraid somebody's deeäd—I'm afraid there's bad news i' that letter."

Nicodemus folded his hands in the attitude of a professional mute at an old fashioned funeral and uttered a deep sigh. He gazed at a tall, resplendent sunflower, while Mr. Poskitt slowly opened the letter, which seemed to forbode ill news, and his head drooped to one side, and his lips pursed themselves together as if he had been anxious to see a sunflower all his life and was at last overcome by its beauty. He heard Mr. Poskitt exclaim, "Deary me—deary me!" and he sighed again, more deeply than ever, and tapped the points of his fingers together.

“ Aye—aye ! ” said Mr. Poskitt, folding the letter and hurrying toward the house. “ It’s just what I thowt it wo’d be—owd Mestur Winterapple o’ Havercroft’s dead. Well, he wor an owd man—eight years owder nor me.”

Nicodemus sighed again.

“ It’s what we must all come to, sir,” he remarked in a strictly correct tone of voice. “ It’s an infirmity which no physician can cure, is death.”

Mr. Poskitt half turned on the garden path, looked out of the corners of his eyes at the postman’s mournful face and figure, and with a sharp, staccato “ Aye ! ” went into the house. Nicodemus turned slowly out of the gate, casting backward glances of wonder at the garden and the windows.

“ Well ! ” he said, as he set his face to the village. “ That’s the first occasion whereon Mestur Poskitt has omitted to offer me hospitality ! It’s ten months and a week since he came to live retired in this delectable house, and it has been my custom to drink a pint of his good home brewed every morning after delivering his letters—



and this morning he never so much as asked me. Dear, dear !—'tis very plain to see that his grief, on hearing of the death of his good friend, Mestur Winterapple, has affected the poor gentleman's brain ! ”

Mr. Poskitt, it is true, had been so much upset by the news of his old friend's death that he had forgotten to offer the postman a pint of ale, but his mental balance was still in its normal state when he walked into his breakfast parlour and found Mrs. Poskitt already seated in state behind her silver tea-pot. He lifted the great tankard of home brewed that always stood beside his own cover and took a hearty pull at its contents.

“ Ah ! ” said Mr. Poskitt, with great appreciation, “ there's noä ale i' all t' countryside like that. Lyddy, owd love, here's some sad news i' this here black edged letter—owd Mestur Winterapple o' Haver-croft's dead.”

“ Dear, dear ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Poskitt pouring out her tea. “ Well, we'd been expecting to hear of it, love, hadn't we ?—he was a very old man.”



“ Why, why ! ” said Mr. Poskitt, sitting down and helping himself somewhat largely to cold roast beef. “ He was not a young man, but he wor nobbut seventy-eight—a matter o’ eight year owder nor me. Howsumiver, young or owd, we must all die, soä there it is. Aye—he’s gone ! ”

“ Who’s the letter from, love ? ” inquired Mrs. Poskitt.

“ It’s thro’ one o’ t’ lasses,” replied Mr. Poskitt, out of a full mouth. “ T’ unmarried dowter—what do they call her—Keziah Jane. Shoo says ’at they’ll tak’ it varry kind if I’ll goä to t’ buryin’ on Friday.”

“ Of course, you’ll go, love ? ” said Mrs. Poskitt.

“ Why cert’n’y,” answered Mr. Poskitt. “ Me an’ owd Tobias wor friends for a matter o’ nigh on to sixty year, I reckon. Aye, I mun drive t’ mare ower on Friday morning. Thou mun see ’at mi black clooäs is gotten out an’ brushed, love, and I’ll away into t’ town efter breeäakfast and buy some gloves, and a mournin’ band to put round t’ hat.”

It was in the most decorous and solemn

trappings of sable that Mr. Poskitt set out in his smart dog cart on the morning of his old friend's funeral. He was a bit of a dandy in his way, as all the country knew, and his usual everyday attire was distinctly gay and sporting, consisting, as it generally did, of smart shooting coats of a large check, fancy waistcoats in bright colours, and horsey-looking riding breeches, Newmarket gaiters, and well made boots. But upon this occasion Mr. Poskitt wore a black mourning suit, very well cut, but very dignified and sombre instead of very smart and sporting, and the glossiness of his immaculate linen was accentuated by the melancholy of his silk cravat, into which, at the last moment, he refrained from sticking the diamond horseshoe pin which had been presented to him by Lord Norman-tower on his completion of fifty years of tenancy on that nobleman's estate. No better test of the solemnity of Mr. Poskitt's feelings and the requirements of the occasion could have been found than an inspection of his pocket handkerchief. He usually affected large and generous wear of this

sort, small counterpane-like things with red or blue ground, whereon were depicted incidents of the chase, the turf, the road, or scenes of rural life, such as a milkmaid in the arms of a shepherd, or a ploughman following his team across the land. But upon this occasion Mr. Poskitt carried a plain white handkerchief of the finest cambric, deeply bordered with black, and lavishly scented with lavender water, and a triangular corner of it stuck out of his breast pocket as a pennon flies at the mast-head of a ship. Round Mr. Poskitt's somewhat jaunty top-hat was folded a four inch mourning band ; on Mr. Poskitt's hands were drawn a pair of black kid gloves ; everything about and around Mr. Poskitt was sombre, saving his own good humoured face ; his silvery beard and bright eyes ; the smart dog cart, with its black body and yellow wheels, in which he sat ; and the lively looking, somewhat skittish bay mare that fretted between the shafts.

Mr. Poskitt set out on his seven mile drive across the country immediately after his nine o'clock breakfast. Passing through

his own village he maintained a dignified and solemn air, and this was one of the remarkably few occasions whereon the bay mare did not pull up at the door of the Blue Lion. Also, the reason which sent him afield that morning being of a nature bordering on the religious, and somewhat, or rather very closely, akin to going to church, Mr. Poskitt refrained from smoking as he drove up the village street. But when he came to the top of the hill, and drew rein for a moment that he might gaze at the familiar valley, and at the great Norman castle which keeps watch and ward over the old town of Sicafter on the opposite side of it, Mr. Poskitt took out his cigar case and lit up, and drove forward under the slopes of Moorside Hill enjoying his tobacco none the less because his thoughts were of the old friend at whose obsequies he was about to assist.

When Mr. Poskitt, his smart dog cart and his lively mare, came to Wickley-in-the-Water, they were joined by Mr. Poskitt's great market friend, Mr. Merrill, who, like Mr. Poskitt, was habited in sober black

from top to toe, and wore a go-to-church expression on his broad countenance. Mr. Merrill was mounted on a stout cob, and he ranged it up alongside his friend's dog cart as they met on Wickley-in-the-Water bridge, and so they went slowly up Wickley Hill together in the direction of Havercroft. It was customary, when these two met, to indulge in a series of small jokes at each other's expense by way of betokening their delight in each other's society, but on this occasion they did no more than exchange a quiet "Good-morning," and Mr. Merrill, who was of a jocose and convivial nature, only called Mr. Poskitt "Owd lad!" once all the way to Havercroft. Neither gentleman referred to the coming event; they talked intermittently of crops, prices, and of countryside gossip; of old Mr. Winter-apple's demise they said nothing.

Havercroft was in mourning, but full of excitement at the prospect of a great burying. Every house in the place was a house of closed blinds—death might have touched every family in the village with his sable wing. In the great solidly-built many-

gabled farmsteads, most of them thickly covered over from base to roof with ivy and jessamine, the white blinds made fierce patches of dazzling light in the rays of the June sun ; under the eaves of the little cottages a square foot or two of a similar dazzling whiteness showed the desire of the working folk to show their respect to the dead man. The effect of all these white blinds reflecting the sunlight was startling to the eye—it impressed itself even upon Mr. Merrill, who was not too observant of obvious things.

“ Seems to have been much respected in his own place,” said Mr. Merrill, looking around him. “ There’s ivvery blind i’ t’ village drawn down.”

Mr. Poskitt gave no more reply to this remark than a laconic “ Aye ! ” and they made their way up the village street in silence, both having thrown away their cigars on first sighting the battlemented tower of Havercroft Church above the belt of elm trees that surround it. In spite of the drawn blinds, there were a good many faces of old and young women in the cottage



doorways or at the garden gates or at the orchard fences, and Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill were much gazed at as they progressed toward the Manor Farm, where poor old Tobias Winterapple, in whose honour all these things were being done, was even then being fastened up in his coffin by the village carpenter, who could undertake a funeral as easily as he could make a cart. But the attention of the villagers was not given entirely to Mr. Poskitt and his friend—they, by this time, were but units in a steadily growing procession of black garmented men with solemn faces, composed to the correct expression for burials, who emerged into the village from all points of the compass and made steadily for the old house at whose gates quite a concourse of the curious, the idle, and the sympathetic had gathered in order to see the funeral set out. Through this throng, kept in order by a perspiring village constable, to whom the day's proceedings were in the nature of an event, Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill made their way and delivered their horse-flesh into the



care of two young ploughmen, attired very stiffly in their best clothes, and ornamented with new neckerchiefs of black silk which they had tied up in large bows that were sometimes under their chins, but more usually under their left ears.

“ Well, I suppose we mun join t’ company,” said Mr. Merrill, with a mighty sigh, as he and Mr. Poskitt turned from the stable yard in the direction of the house.

“ I suppose we mun,” replied Mr. Poskitt, sighing in his turn.

“ Not ’at a buryin’ ’s a joyful occasion,” said Mr. Merrill, still sighing.

“ Noä ! ” assented Mr. Poskitt. “ Owt but ! Howsumiver, it’s what we mun all come to. Come—let’s away into t’ house—I can see young Featherstone—him ’at wed t’ owdest dowter—stan’in’ at t’ door to receive t’ company. Deng my buttons, but it’s a waarm day for a buryin’ ! ”

Mr. Featherstone, son-in-law of the late Mr. Tobias Winterapple, by virtue of his marriage with Martha Elizabeth, eldest daughter of that worthy gentleman, might have re-echoed Mr. Poskitt’s sentiments as

regards the warmth of the day with much truth and fervour. There being no descendants of the Winterapple stock in tail male, it fell to Mr. Featherstone to receive the company at the front door, and with the aid of another son-in-law, Mr. Butcher, to show them, in their various degrees, into the rooms set apart for their accommodation and entertainment. The Manor Farm, being a house of considerable size, contained several large parlours, most of which were usually given up to antimacassars and silence. On this occasion all were brought into use. One was sacred to the relatives of the dead man—his daughters, grandchildren and near relatives ; another to the undertaker and his assistants ; a third to the better class company, such as Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill ; a fourth to what you might call the second degree—the blacksmith, the shopkeepers, the miller, the gamekeeper, and the very small farmers. The labourers on the farm, who were to carry the coffin across to the churchyard, were accommodated in the front kitchen. Similar distinction was made in the refreshments

offered to the company—the folk of high degree in the first parlours had a choice of spirits and wines ; those of the second rank of spirits or ale ; the labourers in the kitchen were regaled on beer and bread and cheese, with the prospect of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding after the obsequies were over.

Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill, shaking hands very solemnly with Mr. Featherstone at the front door, were marshalled into the high degree parlour by Mr. Butcher, and invited to take a chair and have a taste of something “ short ” after their journey. A buxom maid in a new and very stiff alpaca dress and a white apron rustled up to them and asked them in a hushed whisper what they would be pleased to take, to which question each replied that he would take just a taste of Scotch whisky and a little water—a modest demand which the maid satisfied by mixing two stout tumblerfuls and placing them at their respective elbows. Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill took heart after they had drunk—they looked round the room and recognised several of their

friends and nodded solemnly to them. There was an air of repression all over the room—it was like being in church—but here and there men were talking in whispers, and presently Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill and two or three old farmers who sat near them had got their heads together over their glasses and were confabulating upon the difference between old times and new.

“There’s a vast difference ’twixt t’ owd days and theäse,” said a little wizen faced old farmer in a suit of rusty black, which obviously had been made in the sixties and spent most of its days in lavender. “A buryin’s not what it used to be. It’s a varry quiet affair, is a buryin’ now-a-days—just a quiet glass to refresh yourself wi’, like o’t’ efter your journey, and that’s all. Used to be quite different i’ t’ owd days.”

“Aye,” said Mr. Merrill. “I remember ’at when my father died t’ house wor full—all t’ countryside wor theer, atein’ and drinkin’ till they wor fair brussen. They used to consider it t’ reyt occasion for a bit o’ feästin’, but ye niver see nowt o’ t’ soärt now.”

“ An’ a good job, an’ all ! ” said Mr. Poskitt, emphatically. “ A sup o’ whisky or a glass o’ wine, efter a seven mile drive’s nowt but reäsonable, but there’s noä ’casion for owt noä more. There used to be a deäl too much guzzlin’ and swillin’ at buryin’s i’ t’ owd days.”

“ Why, I dooän’t know, Mestur Poskitt,” said the wizen faced man, with a deprecatory smile. “ I’m sewre I dooänt know whether t’ owd system worn’t t’ best. It’s a poor heart ’at niver rejoices, and though a buryin’ ’s noän a varry joyful occasion, a bit o’ revellin’, as you might term it, i’ t’ flesh-pots and t’ wine-pots can turn it into varry near as melodious an event as a weddin’ or a christenin’. Eh, dear, I can bear i’ mind your feyther’s buryin’, Mestur Poskitt—theer wor grand doin’s, an’ all ! I niver seed soä much to ate and drink i’ all my life—varry near ivverybody wor drunk afore they browt t’ corpse downstairs ! It wor t’ grandest buryin’ I ivver saw. But she knew how to do things reyt, did your poor mother—shoo wor one o’ t’ real good owd sort.”

“ Aye ! ” said Mr. Poskitt, snorting.

“ And do ye know what my mother spent o’ that buryin’ ? ’Cos if ye doänt, I do !—not a penny short o’ five hundred pound.”

“ Eh, dear, there wor a deäl o’ unnecessary money spent i’ them times ! ” sighed Mr. Merrill. “ I allus believe i’ owd customs, but I can’t see noä sense i’ throwin’ money away like that—there’s noä need for ’t.”

“ Why, but I shall stan’ up for t’ owd days ! ” said the wizen faced man. “ There wor summat about ’em ’at there isn’t about these here. A bit o’ feästin’ niver did nobody nöa harm, and ye can’t deny ’at a buryin’ does bring all t’ countryside together. It ’d ha’ done noän on us noä harm, I say, if we’d gi’en owd Mestur Winterapple at onny rate a roäst beef buryin’—I’ve hed fower buryin’s i’ my family ; I’ve buried three lads and a lass—t’ lads wor all buried wi’ roäst beef and t’ lass wi’ ham.”

“ We’ll bury ye wi’ roäst goose,” said Mr. Merrill. “ That’ll suit ye varry weel.”

“ There’s niver noä gloves now-a-days,” said another old man. “ I’ t’ owd days



ivverybody 'at cam' to a buryin' hed a pair o' black kid gloves presented to him as soöin as he cam' into t' house."

"Aye, and theer wor crape scarves an' all!" said another feelingly. "I used to goä to all t' buryin's 'at I could when I wor first wed, 'cause t' wife used to gi' t' crape scarves to her mother to mak' caps wi'. But there's nowt o' that now."

"I doänt know what some o' ye chaps wants," remarked Mr. Poskitt, sipping his whisky thoughtfully. "Seeäms to me 'at all 'at ye come to a buryin' for is to fill yer bellies and see what ye can get. Deng my buttons!—I'd be ashämed o' misen if——"

At this moment the door of the parlour—now full of men all conversing in hushed whispers—was suddenly opened, and the village carpenter, very hot, very energetic, and very self-important, appeared on the threshold, waving his top-hat as if to implore silence. An instant hush fell upon the assembly.

"Gentlemen," said the village carpenter, "we'm about to bring down the deceased corpse. If you'll follow me on to the lawn,



gentlemen, I'll marshall you into order for the mournful procession."

To the village folk who stood, bare-headed, open mouthed, wide eyed, on either side of the lane which led to the churchyard, the funeral procession of the deceased Mr. Winterapple was an imposing and momentous spectacle. First came the carpenter, still very much heated and not a little flustered, for this was the most considerable job he had undertaken as yet, and he was just as anxious that all should go well as he was conscious that all depended upon himself. After him came the dead man's labourers, carrying the coffin—a solid affair of polished oak, ornamented with glittering brass, at sight of which the folk in the lane uttered hushed exclamations of delight.

"Eh, si tha'!" said a woman, directing her child's attention to the coffin. "Si tha', joy, look at t' golden handles—they fair shine i' t' sun!"

"They doänt do things at a grand buryin' as they used to," piped an old man as the coffin passed. "I' my time they used to cover t' coffin up' wi' what they termed

a pall, and t' quality o' t' neighbourhood used to walk o' t' side ho'din' it up. They've some varry new fangled ways i' theäse times—I doän't know where we are sometimes—they chänge iverything soä."

The women broke into murmurs as the mourners came into view immediately behind the coffin. They appraised the value of the crape garments worn by the dead man's daughters and wondered what they would do with their heavy veils when there was no longer any need to wear them. Then their curiosity in this respect gave place to an inquisitive desire to inspect the procession. There were quite a hundred sombrely clad men walking three and three after the mourners, and the onlookers betrayed a lively interest in their personalities and commented upon them as the spectators at a football match comment upon popular favourites.

"Theer's t' owd Squire, walkin' at t' heeäd o' t' procession wi' t' Doctor and t' Lawyer. They've all a good reyt to be theer, for t' Squire's hed fifty year' rent out o' owd Tobias, and t' doctor's sattled many

a long bill wi' Tobias' name at t' top, and t' lawyer's done many a job for him and feathered his own nest weel into t' bargain. And theer's Lawson, t' vet—owd Toäby hed many a deäl wi' him, and it 'ud ha' takken t' Owd Lad hissen to ha' bested eyther on 'em. And theer's White, t' corn factor, and Simpson, t' auctioneer—gow, I think all t' countryside's comed to put owd Tobias away i' t' yearth! Si tha', theer's owd Mestur Poskitt, o' Willowford, and Mestur Merrill, o' Wickley-in-the-Watter—them two and owd Mestur Winterapple were great cronies when they used to meet at t' King George i' Sicaster o' market days."

"They weern't meet noä more, onnyway. Deeäth mak's nowt o' friendship."

"Noa, thät's reyt enough. Deeäth mak's nowt o' owt 'at theer is—neyther love, nor matrimony, nor riches, nor high estate. It's t' onnly thing theer is i' all t' world 'at respects nowt at all. When I'm deeäd I shall be as good as t' owd Squire theer, wi' all his brass, for all I'm nobbut a brokken down owd labourer wi' five shillin' a week thro' t' parish."

Overhead the sky was a mighty dome of cloudless blue ; high above the crocketed pinnacles of the old church tower, and the wide stretch of woodland that enclosed the churchyard on three sides, the rooks were calling perpetually ; in the grounds of the vicarage thrush and blackbird and linnet were singing gaily ; dominant above their piping and the calling of the circling rooks rose the deep note of the minute bell. Then, in a sudden hush, came the voice of the parson rising clear above bell and birds, and all the hats went off and old Tobias was carried into the shadow of the ancient lych-gate and up the green slopes of the churchyard for the last time.

Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill sat elbow to elbow in a pew near the chancel. They stared at the painted windows and at the old Norman arches, at the quaint carvings in the walls and at the cross-legged Crusaders in their niches ; they looked at the parson as he read the service, and sometimes they glanced at the Prayer Book, which they held between them, but their minds' eyes were chiefly fixed on dead Tobias. Somehow,

they could not think of old Tobias Winterapple as dead—they had had so many merry jests together, so many cheerful cracks in taverns and ordinaries, at the covertside or on the highway, that to imagine old Toby, with his red face and twinkling eyes, as boxed up there in the coffin, with wreaths of flowers about him, seemed an impossibility.

It took a long time for all the mourners to pass round the open grave when the parson finally closed his book and went slowly away. Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill waited until the throng had cleared ; then they went up to the grave together and looked at the glittering name-plate with its legend : *Tobias Winterapple, born 1824 ; died 1902.* Each heaved a deep sigh as he turned away.

“ He wor t’ best judge of a pig ’at iver I knew, wor Tobias ! ” said Mr. Merrill with heartfelt conviction.

“ And noäbody iver got ower him i’ a bit o’ hoss dealin’ ! ” said Mr. Poskitt, with equal fervour.

They walked back to the Manor Farm together in silence. Most of the men who

had attended the obsequies were already mounting their horses or climbing into their traps; Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill prepared to follow their example. To them, however, came hurrying Mr. Featherstone, whose homely countenance wore an air of relief now that his father-in-law had been safely bestowed in his last resting place.

“Don’t go yet, gentlemen,” said he. “Stop and tek’ a bit o’ dinner wi’ t’ family. I’m sewre mi wife and her sisters ’ud be pleased.”

“Naäy, mi lad, thenkin’ you kindly,” said Mr. Poskitt. “On occasions like these families is best left to theirsens. Ye’ll ha’ t’ will to read, and all that.”

“Aye,” said Mr. Merrill, “we should nobbut be i’ t’ way, Mestur Featherstone—we’ll be goin’ hoämwards, thenk ye.”

“Why, ye mun just come in and shak’ hands, like, wi’ t’ ladies,” urged Mr. Featherstone. “Come in for a few o’ minutes and hev’ a sup o’ whisky—it’ll do you good efter sittin’ i’ that cowl church.”

Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill followed Mr. Featherstone into the house and into the



parlour sacred to the family. Mrs. Featherstone, a stout, rosy-faced lady, the very picture of her dead father, was there alone. She had divested herself of her heavy veil, and had untied the strings of her bonnet, and she now sat in great comfort, dipping sponge biscuits into a glass of sherry and consuming them with evident relish. At the sight of Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill she stretched out a warm hand.

“How do you do, Mr. Poskitt, and how do *you* do, Mr. Merrill?” she said. “I’m sure we’re all deeply obligated to you both for showin’ such respect to mi poor father. Sit you down—happen you’ll stop and tek’ a bit o’ dinner wi’ us? It’s at one o’clock sharp—Lucy and Keziah’s tekkin’ off their mournin’ to attend to it. You can’t, really? Why, then, you mun hev’ a glass o’ whisky before you go—James, get the decanters out and tell one o’ the lasses to bring fresh water.”

“We were varry sorry to hear of your loss, ma’am,” said Mr. Poskitt. “It were summat of a blow to me, though I did expect it in a way. He wor much respected,



wor Mestur Winterapple, and one could ha' liked to see him last a bit longer."

■ Mrs. Featherstone helped Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill to whisky and water, and poured out another glass of sherry for herself.

"Aye, why you see, Mestur Poskitt," she said, "of course, one allus wants to keep them 'at's near and dear, as the sayin' is, as long as one can, but I don't know 'at it's any charity—I'm sure mi poor father's a deal better off wheer he is. You see, he wor getting that bad wi' t' dropsy—t' watter had gotten into his legs, and, of course, i' time it would ha' gotten to his heart. Nay, I think it wor a merciful release, and he's left us all varry well off—varry nicely off, indeed—and so I've naught to say agen t' decrees of Providence. I allus did hold 'at iverything i' this world is ordered for the best."

It was with this comforting assurance warm within them that Mr. Poskitt and Mr. Merrill rode away in the noontide glare, leaving their old friend snug beneath the cool green of the tree shaded churchyard.

THE END

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# BEFORE THE BRITISH RAJ

BY

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